

Celebrations and Convergence for Conservation In Western Ghats

Practitioner's Conclave Mahabaleshwar 2012

30th Nov. , 1st & 2nd Dec. 2012



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Acknowledgements

Celebrating 25 years of Save the Western Ghats March has been very special to all of us at AERF. SWGM of 1987-88 was the moment that had sown seeds for commitment to conservation in our minds. Conservationists are often frustrated about little results, they generally avoid celebrations and civil society is engaged in oppositions to system and policies. In the dark clouds of frustrations and agitations, lot of good positive vibes are lost and we lose energy and vigor to work for conservation day by day , year by year ; ultimately making many direct or indirect compromises. Therefore we persuaded the idea of celebrating the silver jubilee of a path breaking environmental movement of by gone years and to rejuvenate the spirit of civil society.

We would like to thank profusely to Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF) for supporting this idea. CEPF has been working to develop meaningful partnerships for conservation in the Western Ghats biodiversity Hotspot for last few years and without support of remarkable individuals like Dr. Jack Tardoff , Grants Director CEPF and Dr. Patricia Zurita , Executive Director of CEPF, Mahabaleshwar conclave could not have been a reality.

We remain immensely grateful to Mr. Phrang Roy and Indigenous Partnerships for Agro-Biodiversity and Food Sovereignty for supporting and guiding the indigenous day celebrations and food festival as a part of the conclave and providing an opportunity to provide platform to indigenous communities from Western Ghats.

SWG Practitioners' Conclave has been blessed by many individuals who are passionate about Western Ghats and believe in our efforts to join hands with civil society. Such remarkable individuals include Mr. Anupam Mishra an eminent environmentalists and writer ,who not only accepted our invitation to inaugurate but also provided guidance to participants throughout the conclave. His presence kept us going and we thanks him for his being with us. Dr. V.B. Mathur, Dean of Wild Life Institute of India could attend and provided

invaluable guidance to participants and AERF team is indebted to him for his time and interest.

Other such individuals are Mr. Kalanand Mani, Prof. M.K. Prasad, Prof. Madhav Gadgil and Mr. Abhilash Khandekar whose solid contribution to conclave sessions and process was immensely beneficial. Mr. S.R. Hiremath and Mr. Ranjan Rao Yerdoo from Karnataka were of great help and could bring the missing links from 1987-88 to the forefront which were crucial for civil society collaborations for future.

We would like to thank profusely to all our special invitees and session facilitators like Mr. Pushkin Phartiyal and Mr. Sanjay Upadhyay who came all the way to enlighten us with their experiences and provided valuable guidance.

Thanks are due to Mr. Pratim Roy and Ms. Snehlata Nath of Keystone Foundation for their interest and trust as well as for financial support through Swallows India Bangladesh for the conclave.

We are grateful to our supporters Ms. Lab India Instruments Pvt. Ltd. , Vanaz Engineering Ltd . and Central Bank of India Mumbai, for their financial support. Support of individual donors Ms. Almitra Patel from Bangalore and Smt. Vasundhara Jejurikar from Pune is greatly acknowledged. We appreciate the support and interest of Bank of Baroda Pune.

Many thanks are due to the Marchers of SWGM who made it a point to participate in the conclave and provided inspiration to young torch bearers of the Western Ghats.

Conclave Local organizing Committee of committed individuals brought their respective expertise right from management, banking to journalism which contributed best to make this mega event a grand success. Our event of three days would not have been successful without the support of young volunteers and our energetic team at AERF.

Support of MTDC, and its team at the venue and local suppliers also contributed happily to satisfy participants during the conclave with food and wonderful venue arrangements. We thank them for their work.

Finally we would like to thank Save the Western Ghats Group for their interest, and contribution to make practitioner's conclave a unique and special event for Western Ghats.

Executive Summary

Applied Environmental Research Foundation, (AERF) Pune with the Save the Western Ghats group organized a 3 day Practitioners' Conclave from 30th November to 2nd December 2012. The Conclave was organized at the MTDC Complex, Mahabaleshwar and saw a total of 350 delegates. The delegates included conservation practitioners, activists, researchers, educators, students, and writers, members of indigenous communities, local villagers and environment enthusiasts working in the Western Ghats and across the country. The delegates came in from all the Western Ghats states and worked on a cross-section of issues concerning the ecology of the Western Ghats. The conclave marked 25 years of the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88 which was a pioneering environment movement in the Western Ghats. This stakeholders' engagement was meant to be not just a networking endeavor which would help build collaborations and partnerships in the Western Ghats but also a stock taking exercise to assess the changes and developments in the past 25 years. The conclave saw a number of old marchers from the 1987/88 march who shared their experiences, stories and opinions, with the new torch bearers. The exchange of information and knowledge between the old environmentalists and the new generation of conservationists did not just make for very interesting deliberations but helped form a more practical understanding of the work laid out for the future.

The 3 day event had numerous sessions and workshops and brought in many eminent scholars and environmentalists to interact with the audience. The Conclave was inaugurated by eminent Gandhian environmentalist Mr. Anupam Mishra. Noted scholar and chairman of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, Prof. Madhav Gadgil interacted with the audience regarding the findings and the recommendations of the panel. The conclave dedicated the second day to the numerous Indigenous communities who live in harmony with the vivid biological diversity of the Western Ghats terrain. The day saw a unique Food Festival which showcased the cuisine and the culture of some tribal communities of the Western Ghats. This was an attempt to show the linkage between conservation and agro-biodiversity. The tribals from Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala interacted with the delegates and spoke

about the way they work to preserve their agro-biodiversity and work towards food sovereignty.

The assembled delegates also showcased their work through the Environment Dialogues session. There were other sessions and workshops which focused on various burning and crucial issues. The delegates heard more about the trends of urbanization in the Western Ghats, the significance of green economy and institutional frameworks, the role of the media in highlighting environmental concerns and the way they could draw inspiration from local communities' struggles to save the environment. There was a session focused on the recent UNESCO world heritage site tag being accorded to 39 sites in the Western Ghats.

The conclave was organized at a crucial time when the WGEEP report was being widely discussed and the UNESCO world heritage site tag had drawn the attention of the world towards the Western Ghats. The Conclave helped to publicize and put out in the open many issues which were concerning environmentalists and researchers working in the region. The media attention has ensured that the opinions were put across to a wider audience which shall facilitate in an informed debate. This kind of involvement in critical environmental issues shall hopefully translate into sound public policy decisions. The conclave also has laid the foundation of some sustainable partnerships across various fields of work which will be followed up in the near future. It was also an attempt at reuniting with some of the old marchers who have been relentless in their pursuit of just environmental decisions and sustainable development since the past 25 years. The conclave also provided an opportunity to think in new ways about the environmental issues of Western Ghats and helped to carve new paths or strengthen the old ones by civil society to make difference for better.



Section I Background

“ This March is a good idea , but just this March and seminar followed will not do, there is already a surfeit of seminars in the country on ecology , but that does not take us anywhere. The march should generate in the people of the region enough enthusiasm to correct the situation , in their own environment”

(Chandi Prasad Bhat veteran environmentalist and leader of Chipko Movement , Frontline Feb. 28 , 1988)

1. Background

1. Where it all started

It all started more than 25 years ago. A few civil society representatives and passionate individuals noticed the environmental destruction and rapid degradation in the Western Ghats. They wanted to know the reasons and wanted to know the impacts of development on the ground, wanted to talk to communities, civil society organizations and generate awareness about Western Ghats. Meetings, discussions sharing of ideas followed among a group of few which culminated into the historical Save the Western Ghats march of 100 days covering entire length of Western Ghats through six states. The event gathered attention and provided inspiration to many. It has been long time since then. Lot of water has flown through the mountains. It all started in 1987-88.

The single most important thing about keeping the past close to our hearts and etched in our mind, is that it motivates, inspires and guides our way forward. The biggest of changes have been led by the simplest of people who hold in them a strong realization of how wrong things are and a deep conviction to do whatever it takes to reverse this order. At times, their efforts, their persistence and their courage get the desired outcome and at times get lost in the pages of untold history. But, what matters and what needs to be remembered is that each of these efforts contribute in the own significant way towards bringing about change, reversing an unjust order and voicing the concerns of the weak, the marginalized.

2. Save the Western Ghats March

The Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88 was one such endeavor on the part of a motley group of people who came from all walks of life but converged together as they felt the need to protest. They were united by the goal of speaking out against the rabid damage being caused to the pristine Western Ghats. They questioned the development paradigm which affected the forests, natural water streams and left the people of the region further impoverished

and removed from their roots. They marched across the length of the Western Ghats to tell the people that they need to wake up and understand the peril that this natural heritage is facing and sit up and take charge of it.



Western Ghats of India

Source : www.keystonefoundation.org

The seeds of consciousness, for this movement were laid with the Silent Valley agitation in Kerala in the early 80s. But what concretized the environmental movement in the Western Ghats and gave it a unique character was the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88. This 100 day march across the length and breadth of the Western Ghats is a pioneering and pivotal environmental movement not only in Western Ghats but in the entire country and influenced generations to dedicate their lives to fight for the cause of the environment. The march saw a large number of people from all the

Western Ghats states actively participate and walk the talk. Their attempt was to spread awareness to the fault lines created by skewed development and the perils that the environment faces. They urged the people of the region to wake up and speak against such attitudes towards conservation and opt towards methods of sustainable development and growth. This movement spoke about multiple issues which concerned different states and called for a collective



effort to question the authorities and deliver just development. The march marked the beginning of many zealous years of activism, protest and advocacy, granting the Save the Western Ghats Movement its own niche in history.

Marchers of 1987-88 studied, observed and participated in the process of developing a common understanding of ecological status of the Western Ghats hotspot. Probably the effort was ahead of its time, long before the globalization and thinking of hotspots have emerged. The environmental problems and threats to the valuable biodiversity of the Western Ghats were all the same, with magnitude lower than today. Though Save the Western Ghats March was successful as a campaign at that time, the movement continued for couple of years, but could not develop further into a platform due to lack of specific efforts and support. Nevertheless, many new action groups took inspiration from it, and started working at grassroots level in the region. However the spirit of such movements needs to be kept alive through continuous discussions, churning and building capacity to deal with landscape level threats to conservation and sustainable development issues.



The Save the Western Ghats march started on 1st November 1987 from northern & Southern ends of Western Ghats mountain chain and concluded in Goa on 4th Feb. 1988. In many ways it has been a remarkable achievement. It has aroused tremendous interest especially among urban middle class and over 160 grassroots organizations.

3. Mahabaleshwar Conclave

In the past couple of years, Western Ghats has mainly been in the news for either reports of a glamorous tag as World Heritage Site or a controversy created by Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) Report. It has been observed that such information often tends to overshadow the existent crisis within the Western Ghats. As a result, people are mistaken with the perception that there is nothing gravely problematic within the Western Ghats.

At this eleventh hour, when the phenomenon of global warming is daily in the news, it is crucial to strike a balance between environment and development. The Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot, are home to myriad species

of flora and fauna. However, the greenhouse gases, deforestation and rabid mining activities are adversely affecting the Western Ghats. Therefore, preserving this biodiversity hotspot is imperative and this very thought needs to be converted into action.

Save Western Ghats practitioners conclave organized at Mahabaleshwar by Applied Environmental Research Foundation in collaboration with Save the Western Ghats group 2012 has been one such action and continuation of the efforts to Save Western Ghats that began 25 years ago by civil society groups.

The Western Ghats of India, which has been recently accorded the status of World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is one the global biodiversity hotspots. This heritage site continues to capture the imagination of the world with its endemic flora and fauna and pristine scenic beauty. It has recently been in the news for not only the rabid mining and deforestation activities degrading its landscape but also for the controversial WGEEP report, finally being made public.



This Report recommended that the entire Western Ghats to be declared as Ecologically Sensitive Area and has strongly spoken against the debilitating development projects in the region. This report marks a milestone in the journey towards saving the Western Ghats which started decades ago. This is a crucial time for dialogue, deliberations and fostering new collaborations, towards taking the cause of conservation forward. To give space and a platform for such constructive dialogue to take place, Applied Environmental Research Foundation, Pune and The Save the Western Ghats Group organized the 'Save the Western Ghats Meet , **'Practitioners' Conclave'** at Mahabaleshwar from 30th November to 2nd December 2012. This was a stakeholders' meet for all likeminded people united by the vision of protecting the Western Ghats.

The Meet saw around 350 delegates from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Puducherry, New Delhi, Meghalaya, Gujarat etc. The participants included members of the Civil Society, Activists, and Researchers, Government

officials, Artists, Writers, Corporate officials and Students. This 3 day concave was marked by a number of informative and deliberative sessions and workshops on various concerns of the Western Ghats. Renowned speakers like Mr. Anupam Mishra, Prof. Madhav Gadgil, and Dr. V.B. Mathur addressed the participants. This meet also marked 25 years of the historic Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88 and saw a large number of erstwhile marchers attend the Conclave with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

4. Legacy of the Movement

A movement is by its nature dynamic and changing and that is of course challenging. A movement, however, has great possibilities of bringing about change since its existence and its activities are the outcomes of people joining together for a common goal. Save the Western Ghats Movement also went through many phases of heady activism in the beginning, certain slow quiet movement and again speeded up since 2009 revival.

In the interim there were new issues which cropped up in the Western Ghats, while old issues continued intensifying. Rabid mining, deforestation, large development and ignorance of the government machinery towards Western Ghats; continued corroding its ecological integrity. Though individual efforts never ceased, there was a growing need for a collective voice to come up and unified resistance to speak against further environmental damage. With these ideals in mind, the movement was revived in the year 2009 in Goa. There were many people who congregated in Goa and pledged to take this movement forward. In the interim of a decade or more, there were many changes in the way in which forms of activism and advocacy had played out. Therefore there was a need to create a means to share these new experiences, ideas and viewpoints. The format of an annual stock taking meeting was devised so that all civil society organizations could meet and exchange notes about various issues plaguing the terrain. This meeting would also ensure that the networking and relationship building gradually gets stronger and collective engagement becomes easier. At the end of the Goa meeting, a core group called the Save the Western Ghats group was constituted to dispense these duties. This group comprises of members from civil society organizations who are from different age groups, geographical locations and areas of expertise.

This informal non structured group performed well for next couple of years till the Mahabaleshwar conclave to continue building civil society consensus.

The 2010 meeting in Kotagiri marked a milestone in the movement. It was



attended by the then Environment Minister, Mr. Jairam Ramesh as the chief guest. After a series of five riveting presentations, the SWG group questioned him about his response to the issues flagged. He then announced the formation of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel headed by veteran environmentalist

Prof. Madhav Gadgil. This was hugely influenced by the intense lobbying of the SWG group and marked an important point in the trajectory of positive interventions in the Western Ghats which could have the potential of changing the detrimental situation of the present day. The next year, the meeting was organized in Moodbidri, Karnataka and focused on 'Youth for the Western Ghats'. It tried to generate more interest amongst the youth to take up issues of conservation and actively be a part of the movement.

The meeting of 2012 was 4th in the series. But it also marks 25 years since the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88.

It also came at a critical juncture in the political environment of the Western Ghats. On one hand there was jubilation and celebration about the Western Ghats making it to the UNESCO World Heritage site list but, on the other hand there was a lot of skepticism amongst the organizations in the



Western Ghats because of the unfair treatment by state governments to the Gadgil Panel report. Both these issues are being widely discussed and opined on. At this juncture this conclave had a lot of concerns it needed to give space to. Its significance became even more important as this could be a forum where there could be a celebration of the past, while facilitating discussions for the future.

The meeting was organized at the Maharashtra Tourism Development Complex, Mahabaleshwar from 30th November 2012 to 2nd December 2012. To bring the Save the Western Ghats Movement out of the label of gathering of activist's who are resistant to all development, however was the biggest challenge. Therefore AERF tried its best to engage as many stakeholders' group possible in the conclave and made every effort to bring them in the conclave.

5. Target Audience

Mahabaleshwar conclave was a stakeholders' meeting which aimed at drawing people from all walks of life including members of civil society organizations, researchers, activists, writers, authors, journalists, teachers, students and nature lovers. One of the key objectives of the conclave was strengthening networks and building stronger relationships. Therefore, we did not focus on one particular group and instead focused on making the Conclave more holistic and inclusive by trying to rope in all people who could influence a political decision and contribute positively for the cause of the Western Ghats.

Some of the key categories identified were

- **Civil Society organizations, researchers, students, lawyers and educationists** working on cross-cutting issues in the Western Ghats. This would be an attempt to generate interest in them to be a part of the SWG Movement and also learn from the experiences which they share. The Meet was titled as **Practitioners' Conclave** because it aimed at moving beyond just talks and opinions. It showed how some organizations and individuals practice and irrespective of all odds bring the change. It was for sharing experiences.
- **Journalists** who are interested in environmental issues. It is crucial to involve the media in this kind of advocacy as the media has the potential and the resources at disposal to disseminate information and generate opinions. The proceedings of the Conclave would remain limited to the present delegates without the media and the purpose of the Conclave would be defeated. The association of the Movement with the media is absolutely necessary for all future endeavors.

- **Members of Indigenous Communities** from across the Western Ghats. These are the people who have the deepest relationship with nature and face the direct brunt of the adverse effects of development. Any form of deliberation on methods of conservation and sustainable development cannot be complete without taking into account their ideas and views.
- **Villagers** from across the Western Ghats. True environmental justice can only happen when the decisions are taken at the lowest level. This is the essence of democracy and keeping true to that spirit, we would need the involvement of people from the villages to participate in the discussions and provide their input.
- **Members from the private sector, government officials and politicians.** It is always important to involve the people who are capable of influencing political decisions pertaining to environment rather than closing all channels of dialogue with them. Merely considering them antagonistic to the cause and stopping all channels of negotiations and discussions will only weaken the cause.

6. Objectives

The larger goal of the Save the Western Ghats Movement is to aid the creation of a society in Western Ghats region that is just, fair and environmentally conscious. This movement aims at challenging the current paradigm of development and spread more awareness about pro-people, pro-environment, inclusive and sustainable development. The movement over the period of time has tried to mainstream the Western Ghats. The Conclave too aimed at moving closer to these larger goals.

The Conclave in Numbers

-  **345** delegates took part in the conclave over the course of 3 days.
-  **64** villagers from Northern Western Ghats attended the conclave.
-  **45** members of Indigenous Communities from **8** different communities attended the conclave.
-  **40** speakers from different areas of expertise addressed the audience in various sessions and presentations.
-  **34** old marchers from the SWG March of 1987/88 were felicitated.
-  **25** members including the local organizing committee, staff of AERF and volunteers helped in the smooth conduction of the 3 day conclave.
-  **20** friends from the Media attended the conclave and carried reports in their respective newspapers and news bulletins.
-  **15** different sessions and workshops were conducted in the course of 3 days.
-  People from **10** different states and union territories of India attended the Conclave.

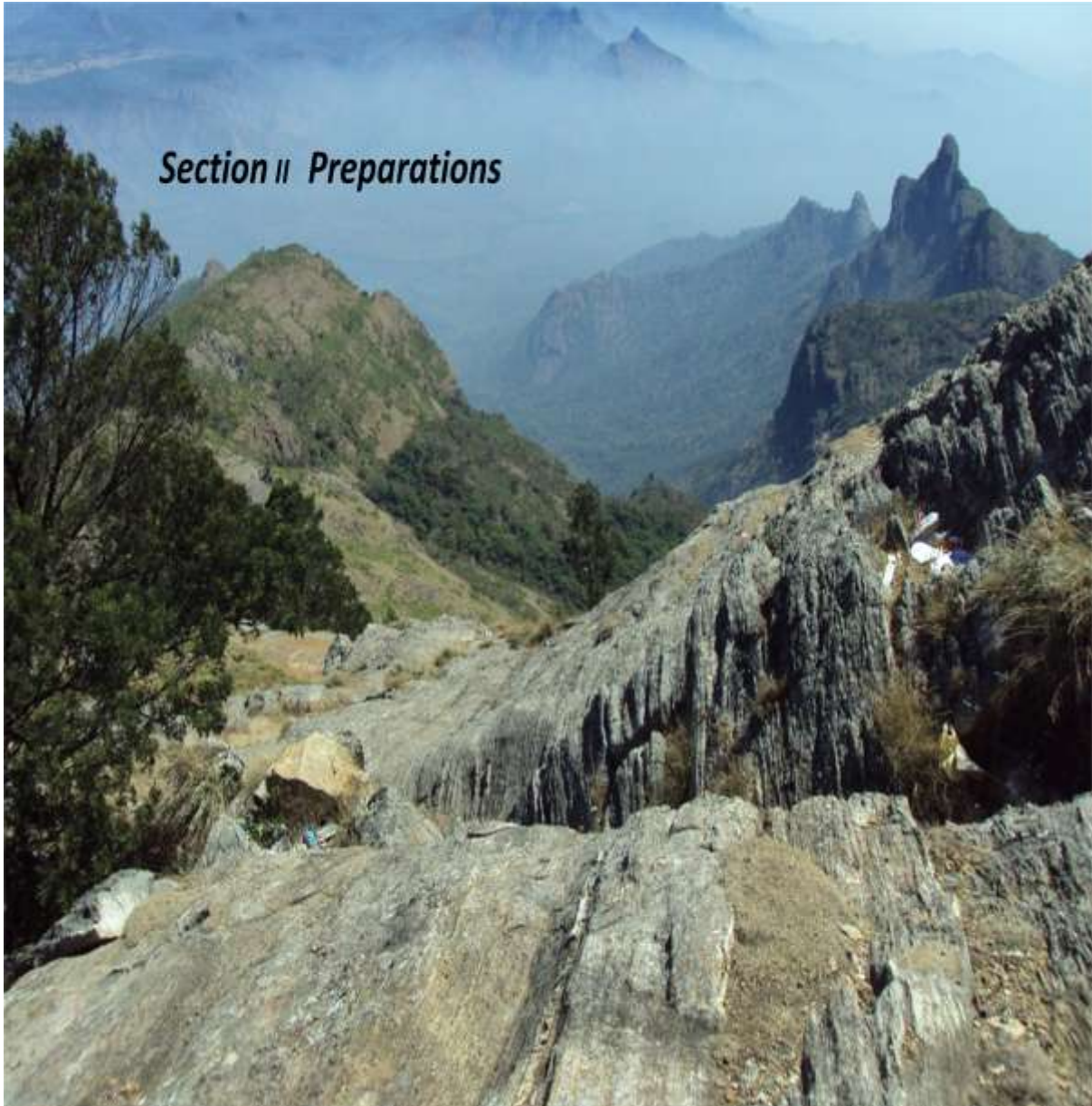
The specific objectives of the Mahabaleshwar conclave

- *The Conclave was intended to be a celebration of 25 years of the Save the Western Ghats Movement. It should be a stock taking exercise of the changes that this terrain has seen in 25 years and account for the difference in the range of issues and activism. It should provide space for further churning of ideas for future endeavors.*
- *This Conclave was meant to give space to practitioners' from different states of the Western Ghats to network, share their experiences, success stories, road blocks and persistent problems. It would be a platform for*

everyone to collectively discuss broader issues of the Western Ghats as well as speak about region and sector specific problems and solutions. This collective deliberation and interactions with a large number of likeminded people would prove to be effective in the longer run. There can be a lot of learning from the differences and the similarities of the people gathered. The Conclave could thus facilitate the formation of long term and fruitful partnerships and collaborations in the Western Ghats.

- *Dissemination of information, awareness creation and generating interest among a large number of people* through effective use of media about key concerns, e.g WGEEP report as well as the problems and solutions to deal with them.

Celebrations of 25 years of efforts, grief, failures, successes, collaborations are important to discuss; as the destruction is on since then and we are looking forward to work together to bring the change as Chandi Prasadji cautioned 25 years ago . Otherwise the conclave could be one more seminars on ecology of Western Ghats.



1. Search began..

It has been 25 years since Save the Western Ghats March of 1987-88 and the vision of the marchers and the believers of the mission are still being carried forward by new torch-bearers. Old problems persist, new problems are emerging and the magnitude and impact of both issues and agitations have changed with time. But, the goal of conserving the Western Ghats and preserving this heritage site is still driving thousands of people. And each one, in their individual big and small ways is trying to keep the dream alive; the dream, of saving the Western Ghats.

The preparations for the conclave have started from 2011 when it was envisaged that the celebration of 25 years since the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88. This march had been the first agitation and involvement of a number of active practitioners' in the Western Ghats and was a unifying factor for the activists working in the different parts of the Western Ghats. Therefore it was utmost important to search those foot soldiers and organizations supported them on the way. It was a challenge though. It was also decided that this meeting would be more inclusive and would like to seek the involvement of both members from the government and the corporate sector. It was also decided early on that the conclave would not be another mere brain storming session, but would try to offer practical solutions. Many a times, sincere committed activists meet, deliberate among themselves and produce recommendations. There is a resistance from within the groups of activists to engage other stakeholders or to openly invite the debate to discuss other side of the story. At the Mahabaleshwar conclave we tried to set the different trend and tried to take the conclave for saving Western Ghats beyond the realm of activists. Therefore, the meet would be a **Practitioners' Conclave** and would primarily target the people who do want to make an intervention on the field for better conservation practices; of course activists continued playing an important role.

2. Meetings & deliberations

The concerted efforts preparing for the Conclave started in the month of June 2011. We understood the need of massive networking efforts, forming effective communication strategies and even organized pre-conclave awareness building exercises to spread word about the event. Our motive was



to generate more and more public interest for the conclave and try to rope in people from all walks of life. The only criterion which was needed was conscientious environmental awareness and the drive to conserve the pristine Western Ghats. These efforts were crucial to generate more attention and diverse viewpoints for the conclave. The organization of the annual meetings was supported by involvement of members of Save the Western Ghats group. We organized quite a few meetings with this group to define the objectives, to share the responsibilities of organization of the conclave, to search for

marchers of 1987-88 in their own states and ideas for fund raising. Three pre conclave meetings of this group have been organized in Sept. 2011 (Mulshi) March 2012 (Kotagiri) and August 2012 (Mulshi). In these meetings we have discussed the various ideas and plans of the conclave, collective actions like sessions outlines, posters, engaging local government bodies like Panchayats and youth and such like issues. This group also had one meeting at Bellagio Italy during the seminar on **Environmental Movements** organized by one of SWG group members Mr. Pratim Roy in Sept. 2012.

AERF formed a Local Organizing Committee for the conclave to support AERF team in planning, managing and implementing various activities prior, during and after the conclave. This committee has been composed of people from various walks of life like professors, corporate managers, media personnel, event managers, financial experts, writers and representatives of North Western Ghats Conservation Network (NWCN). There was a regional representation and gender balance in the Local Organizing Committee. In all six

Local Organizing Committee meetings have been organized to plan the conclave activities, to share the responsibilities, to discuss fund raising and publicity and to support AERF conclave team time to time.



Common poster of SWGM 1987-88

In May 2012 AERF team visited Goa especially to meet Mr. Kalanand Mani of Peaceful Society of Goa who was central coordinator of the Save the Western Ghats March 1987-88. Discussions with him provided lot of understanding about engaging the old Marchers into the process and he generously provided the archival material like photographs and documents of the SWGM 1987-88.

3. Networking Initiatives

- AERF conclave team started networking efforts by collating the delegate lists of the previous three Save the Western Ghats meets at Goa, Kotagiri and Moodbidri. Team tried to fill in the gaps in the contact sheets by finding the information online and by contacting informal sources. The team later segregated the list state-wise and also according to areas of work and sent out formal email invites. For the first month team asked invitees to subscribe to our website www.savethewesternghats.org
- AERF sent out monthly newsletter (*Sahydri Varta*) and registration details to all the subscribed members at regular intervals. The process of registration started in the month of August. We subsidized the accommodation and food charges for all the participants and fixed the registration charges at Rs. 500 per person.
- The team AERF circulated the information that the tribal participants and local villagers would not have to pay anything for participating in the Conclave. The organizers would bear the entire charges for their travel, accommodation and food for all 3 days. There were many interested civil

society members, researchers and activists who took up this opportunity to bring with them villagers and members of Indigenous communities from their field areas.

- AERF flagged of the idea of Conclave Fellows during the process of networking. This scheme was offered so that money is not a constraint for interested participants. According to this scheme, the organizers would bear the entire cost of travel, food, accommodation for the fellows and would waive the registration charges also. But, post the announcement of the *Conclave Fellowship*, we received numerous applications for the fellowship but very few registrations. Keeping in mind the financial needs of the conclave, we disbanded the Fellowship scheme after a week and awarded the fellowship to 10 people who were in need and could not get financial support from any other sources. Though we stopped awarding conclave fellowships, we waived the participation and accommodation fees of many other participants who could not pay the conclave charges. It was just the terminology that was removed.
- One of the key networking attempts was to trace back the whereabouts of the old marchers who had participated in the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88. We sent out messages in all our newsletters, media reports, brochures and posters requesting old marchers to contact us. We also used personal contacts through fellow collaborators and friends to reach out to old marchers. Some of these efforts bore results as within the first month of publicity efforts, we heard back from many old marchers. They expressed their interest to participate in the conclave and also helped us with a lot of archival material. We used the photographs, stories and publicity material by them to come up with a fresh stock of publicity material which we put up on our website and published in our newsletter. The old marchers helped us to establish more contacts with other marchers whose contacts were not public since the past many years. Reuniting with these veterans motivated us towards working harder for the conclave.

- AERF undertook some major networking exercises in Kerala to rope in more participants and establish contacts with old marchers. There was a meeting organized in Thrissur, Kerala to commemorate 25 years of the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88 in Oct. 2012 at Kerala Forestry Research Institute. The meeting was mostly limited to the marchers from Kerala but was an excellent opportunity for us to network with the assembled people. It was also an opportunity for us to get an idea of the changes in activism in Kerala. This meeting saw some very pertinent issues concerning the Kerala Western Ghats being discussed. The WGGEEP report as well as its key recommendations on Athirapilly hydro-electric project was discussed. The veteran leader of the Chipko Movement, Shri Chandi Prasadji Bhatt was the chief guest in the event. He spoke about the dwindling significance given to green issues in the public sphere. There were many students from the local colleges who took part in the event and many old photographs from the SWG March of 1987/88 were put on display.

AERF conclave team spent 2 days at Thrissur and established contacts with nearly 25 old marchers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Team also met many activists from Kerala who are working on a host of issues and invited them for the conclave. The idea of the conclave and the purpose behind it was well appreciated and the publicity material was distributed to nearly 50 people. In the final event, we received many delegates who we had interacted with at this conference in Thrissur.

- The conclave team managed to have talks with the Ruchie Farmers' Group, Wayanad at the Thrissur Conference. This group works on the issues of local food security and promotes the use of locally produced Jackfruit and Bamboo. They work with the Paniya community of Wayanad. This group expressed interest to showcase their work at the Conclave and participate in the Food Festival.
- AERF worked in collaboration with the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri to present the food culture of the Irula, Urab, Kasavar communities through the Food festival. The Keystone Foundation which was an active



member of the Save the Western Ghats Group , routinely works with the members of these communities on issues of livelihood and Conservation. These indigenous communities form the Nilgiris presented food items prepared from locally produced millets, local honey and other small food items.

- Another group which took part in the food festival was the Tribal Foundation, Kanyakumari. During our online research to trace organizations working on food cultures in the Western Ghats, we came across an article in the Chennai edition of The Hindu which documented the work being done in Kanyakumari by environmental educator Mr. S. S Davidson. A little more exploration into the work of Mr. Davidson, put us across to the Tribal Cultural Heritage in India Foundation which is based in Amsterdam. This organization documents the work being done to preserve the local cultures of various communities. It was through them that we got across to Mr. S.S. Davidson who works relentlessly with the Kani community of Tamil Nadu. Mr. Davidson willingly accepted our invitation to take part in the food festival and attended it with 4 other members of his tribal foundation.
- There were three other Indigenous communities which took part in the Conclave. Three members from the Soliga Community from Male Mahadeshwara Hills, Karnataka were accompanied by Mr. R. P Harisha from Asoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE).
- The Mahadev Koli community from Bhimashankar, North Western Ghats is a community that works with the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) Pune. Fifteen members of this community took part in the Conclave and 5 members participated in the Food Festival. The Another group from AERF's filed area from Konkan also participated in the food festival.

- The AERF conclave team sent out invites to many email groups, state environment portals and mountain networks. Team also sent out invites to all the organizations enlisted in our database which we had obtained through previous interactions and collaborations. We also sent out our brochures, posters and invites to all the Universities in Northern Maharashtra and especially approached the Environment Science departments of these universities. Invitations were also sent out to various research centers in Pune. Some of these institutes were Pune University, Shivaji University-Kolhapur, SIBER College-Kolhapur, Garware College-Pune, Fergusson College-Pune, Symbiosis Institute-Pune, and Agarkar Research Institute-Pune. This was an attempt to rope in interested students and teachers. There were posters made in Marathi which were circulated in rural areas of Northern Maharashtra to invite more villagers to take part in the conclave.
- AERF invited all the district collectors of the Western Ghats districts, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of all the Western Ghats states and the heads of the State Biodiversity Boards. We also sent out invites to the chairmen of the Tourism departments of all the state governments.
- The invitations were also sent to all the members of Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) and few members of High Level working Group formed by the MoEF under the chairmanship of Dr. Kasturirangan, to work further on the recommendations of WGEEP.
- In order to spread more awareness about the conclave in the state of Karnataka and get to know more about the nature of issues there, we collaborated with the Samaj Parivartan Samudaya (SPS), Dharwad. SPS led by the veteran SWG Marcher, Mr. S. R Hiremath has been working continuously since the past many years on issues of skewed development and forest rights in Karnataka. This networking exercise helped us interact with Mr. Hiremath and get to meet other organizations in this area. This also helped us to shape our sessions and

workshops better so as to include questions and problems experienced in the Karnataka Western Ghats.

- The state of Gujarat also houses a critical part of the Western Ghats which is rich in biodiversity and is home to a number of Indigenous communities. The Dang region of Gujarat usually escapes the attention in conferences pertaining to issues of the Western Ghats. Even after a few months into the preparation for the conclave, we did not receive any response from Gujarat. With an intention of networking with some organizations in Gujarat, we undertook a week long networking exercise in Gujarat. During the course of this exercise we visited many government and civil society organizations in Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar and Surat. We had detailed discussions with the Director of the GEER Foundation, Gujarat Tourism, and Centre for Environmental Education, Gujarat and Gujarat State Environment Department. Our initiative was received with a lot of enthusiasm by these government departments and they also followed it up with us to ensure some participation. Gujarat tourism was also interested in showcasing Saputara, the only Western Ghats Hill station in the area. Due to some reasons, this arrangement could not work out in the last minute but the networking exercise proved to be extremely fruitful. We also publicized our conclave at IIM, Ahmedabad and South Gujarat University. We invited Dr. Minoo Parabia from Surat as one of our speakers for the Indigenous day celebrations.

4. Communication Initiatives

- One of the first strategies while preparing for the Conclave was to create and maintain a dedicated website for the Conclave. We started dedicated website www.savethewesternghats.org for the conclave. The objective of the website was to search the marchers of 1987-88, to provide updated information about the conclave, to upload the useful literature produced during the SWGM 1987-88, reports of earlier SWG annual meetings, relevant publications of the CSO groups and to provide glimpses of the 1987-88 march to inspire new generation of Western Ghats enthusiasts. The website carried the information on the legacy of

the Save the Western Ghats Movement and the history of the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987-88.

- The website www.savethewesternghats.org was regularly updated with information, agenda and objectives of the SWG Practitioners' Conclave 2012. Apart from this it also featured news items from the Western Ghats, Conclave newsletter and archival material from 1987/88. Visitors could subscribe to get updates and later could register for the Conclave through the website. At present the website carries the entire networking database that was created through the course of preparing for the Conclave, photographs, detailed report of indigenous day celebrated on 2nd Dec. as a part of Mahabaleshwar conclave. AERF team intends to keep the website active, running and use it as an interactive and informative portal for the CSOs of the Western Ghats.
- AERF effectively used social media during the course of the Conclave. AERF had an active Face book page 'Save the Western Ghats-Mahabaleshwar' and a twitter handle '@SavetheWesternGhats' which was created in the month of June 2012. We used these media throughout, to generate more interest about the Western Ghats and to create more awareness about the purpose and agenda of the Conclave. These pages see active participation even now and have been immensely successful in information dissemination. We even created a video documenting the issues of the Western Ghats which has received more than 300 hits on You Tube.¹ In 2 weeks time. An eight minutes film based on some footage and still photographs of 1987-88 march has been prepared by AERF team and SPJMER interns and uploaded on the website in August 2012.
- A logo provides a pictorial view of what an institution, organization and event stands for and represents. A logo is of critical importance when it comes to communicating the ideals, views and objectives behind an

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oClknDjgEC>

event and it also helps people to associate a cause with an image. With these views in mind, we had decided to prepare a logo which would help communicate not just the mission but also the journey of the Save the Western Ghats Movement.

We conveyed our ideas to our website partners Red Chip Solutions and artists at Mediascope , who came up with a range of ideas for a communicative logo. The Conclave team also tried to engage the

armatures in the process of logo designing and floated an appeal on the conclave face book account. However the response to this appeal was very meager and we had to concentrate on professional artists of these companies to work on logo. After many discussions, brain storming sessions and bouncing of ideas, we finally arrived at our present logo.

Genesis of a logo



Final conclave logo captures the beauty of the Western Ghats and the biodiversity that the world swears by. We see the lush green tree at the foothill of the tall brown mountain chain along with the giant Asiatic elephant symbolizing the diverse wildlife of the Western Ghats. We see people from the tribal communities coexisting with nature. We also see them engaged in their traditional folk merriment indicating the importance of preserving their culture and mores. The logo in its entirety symbolized



the beauty, the cultural integrity and the immense biodiversity of the Western Ghats. At one glance, one could associate oneself with all that this heritage mountain chain stands for. The logo was widely appreciated by all the stakeholders and has a good recollection value.

- AERF used the internet to spread the information about the scope and agenda of the conclave. We advertised the conclave in India Water Portal, Conservation India website, Indian Tribal Heritage website, India Everyday website, and the Mumbai Hikers blog page. These portals are widely viewed by conservationists and helped us elicit a lot of response for the conclave.
- Our LOC members and media expert Mr. Alhad Godbole, former Executive Editor Loksatta (Marathi daily of the Indian Express group) organized meetings with important media houses in Mumbai for pre-conclave publicity. He discussed the timely organization of the conclave and its significance with editors of newspapers like Mumbai based Marathi Daily Maharashtra Times, Divya Marathi, Loksatta, Prahar, Sakal and English newspapers like Times of India, Indian Express and Sakal Times. He also organized meetings with editors of Marathi TV channels like ABP News, ZEE TV and IBN Lokmat. We have also provided press briefs to main media houses from other Western Ghats states like The Hindu and Matrubhumi.
- The news about the conclave was published in Times of India (Pune and Goa edition) and the Indian Express in the month of July and November. The Marathi newspaper Sakal also carried a report in the month of July informing people about the Conclave. There were 2 media briefs sent out to all leading media houses in the month of August and November 2012.²
- AERF team formed a data base of journalists and media houses who were invited to participate in the conclave. We hosted 20 journalists

² Please refer to the links at the end of the section.

from various print and electronic media houses for the 3 days of the conclave.

- In the year 2012 there were quite a number of international meetings organized by leading global conservation organizations and Governments. AERF conclave convener Dr. Archana Godbole and AERF Deputy Director Mr. Jayant Sarnaik attended IUCN World Conservation Congress at Jeju, South Korea in Sept. 2012 and CoP 11 on Convention on Biological Diversity held in Hyderabad India in Oct. 2012. At Jeju IUCN WCC, Dr. Archana Godbole gave a presentation in the session organized by IUCN South Asia regional office about role of civil society in conservation and collaborations. This was an excellent opportunity to publicize the conclave and discuss the need of civil society action. Specific publicity of the conclave has been done with many international organizations as well as IUCN India member organizations. In CoP 11 meeting many CEPF grantee organizations were contacted and invited for the conclave.

5. Awareness Initiatives

- AERF intended to use the conclave and the days leading up to it as an opportunity to spread more information about the work going on in the Western Ghats in the field of conservation and sustainable development. We therefore started an online newsletter 'Sahyadri Varta' which told stories of various activists working in the Western Ghats. This newsletter was circulated to all the subscribers of the website and also put up on the conclave website. This newsletter was critical in flagging off issues which were to be discussed during the 3 days and helped us get a preliminary feedback from people. Two issues were compiled and released on the internet before the Conclave and two issues were circulated right after it. These issues talked about some of the efforts undertaken by local organizations about generating awareness regarding the ecological status of the Western Ghats and the role of the Practitioners' Conclave. We also invited people to take part in

the conclave and kept the lookout of the old marchers on through the articles in the newsletter.

- AERF planned to release a book documenting Environmental struggles in the Western Ghats. This book would help people relate to the power of people based struggles and motivate them for the long journey ahead. In order to prepare for this book we got in touch with many activists and environmentalists who have spearheaded environmental movements in the Western Ghats. Through the course of collecting and compiling these stories, we gained a lot more insight into these agitations which helped us frame the sessions better. It also helped us to put more pointed questions in the concept notes of the sessions.
- The Ministry of Environment and Forests Govt. of India, supported AERF to organize a Sacred Groves Yatra in Akole in the month of November as an awareness building exercise for the conclave. The Saurav Gram Vikas Pratishthan, Akole the local organization partnered with AERF to organize this Yatra(March / Campaign) . They involved the village youth,



local residents and members of their organization to walk the stretch of the groves and tried to understand the ecological importance of the sacred groves. Apart from this it was also important to reiterate the cultural and religious significance of the

sacred groves. The idea of scared groves is intrinsically connected to age old conservation practices and people still use this deep set relationship between man and nature for protection of these pristine forest lands. The practitioners' conclave could only benefit by such exercises where the people are more sensitized to the ways and means through which conservation could be aided and the local people could be involved in it.

A 15 member group from Saurav Gram Vikas Pratishthan including 2 international participants from Sweden and three AERF team members took part in the week long Yatra. They brought their experiences to the conclave and discussed the issue at length with conclave participants.

- The AERF team prepared printed material, which were primarily intended at generating awareness about the ecology of the Western Ghats and the development problems surrounding it. The goal was not just to advertise the Conclave, but to give the people a lot of background information on the type of issues prevalent in the region. This would give them an idea on the questions which they could raise at the conclave and the debates which would centre around them. We printed 3 brochures, 2 in English and 1 in Marathi which were circulated all around. The first brochure in English contained a brief of the history of the Save the Western Ghats Movement, gave an idea of the march of 1987/88 and highlighted the themes and objectives of the conclave. The second brochure in both English and Marathi flagged off the specific sessions which were to take place in the conclave. We also gave an outline behind the reason these themes were selected to be a part of the conclave. The English brochures were circulated outside Maharashtra, while the Marathi brochures were sent to and distributed across villages in the Western Ghats in Maharashtra. The brochures helped us connect with stakeholders across states and occupations. This gave an idea of the kind of interactions, this conclave should facilitate.
- Nashik Nature Conservation Trust headed by Kiran Rahalkar and Ketan Patwardhan organized a river walk as a pre-conclave awareness generating drive. On the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5), the Trust organized a walk along the banks of river Godavari which is critical to the ecology of Nashik. The purpose of the walk was to take a break from discussions and take people out in the open. This way they could not only appreciate the beauty of the river but also get an understanding on the ecological, cultural and religious significance of the river. They could get an idea about the problems of littering, pollution and contamination which is destroying the water body and proving to be

a threat to the environment. This walk helped generate awareness about the conclave while addressing specific questions about the Godavari River and generally about water pollution in the Western Ghats.



- The organizers tried involving the members of the North Western Ghats Conservation Network in awareness building measures

before the conclave. The Ranwata Nature and Environment Society, Satara in association with Terre Policy Centre and Association of Hospital Owners organized a one day seminar on 1st April 2012 was once such opportunity. This seminar was meant on creating community awareness for sustainable development in the Kaas plateau which is located at a distance of 30 km from Satara. The Kaas plateau is a charming stretch with high endemism and a unique plateau ecosystem. It is constantly under the threat of degradation due to habitat destruction, windmill creation, burning, hunting, poaching etc. This seminar was aimed at addressing these issues. It was all the more important to talk about Kaas as it was received a Natural Heritage site tag by UNESCO recently (one of the 39 sites from Western Ghats).

Representatives of UNESCO-India, members of local communities, scientists, researchers, entrepreneurs dealing with waste recovery and recycling, eco-tours, and hotel and transport operators working in the region as well as members of public departments took part in the seminar. This was another opportunity to inform about the Mahabaleshwar conclave and appeal the participants of the seminar to participate the conclave.

6. Issues faced during preparatory phase

The phase of preparations was a long and arduous journey. The team at AERF and members of the Local Organizing Committee had a huge task in front of

them to make the conclave both holistic and enriching. The guidance of old marchers and the members of the Save the Western Ghats group at all points acted as a beacon of encouragement. There were meetings at regular intervals which updated the SWG members about the advancements in the preparation. They helped us with new contacts, refined the themes of discussions and put us across to other stakeholders who were interested in the conclave. The SWG members come from various organizations and work across the Western Ghats. Therefore, at times it was extremely difficult to coordinate and organize meetings. Therefore most of the conversations followed through emails and phone calls.

One of the issues needed to be tackled was the nature of the conclave and the issues it was to represent. While the organizers from the beginning envisaged this to be an avenue where all the stakeholders would be welcome, there were differing views to it. Some members of the Save the Western Ghats group did not want the government and the corporate to be involved in the conclave as they felt that it would send out a wrong message of coalescing with the enemies. A few group members did not find the name '**Practitioners' Conclave**' to be very suitable as they felt that it would limit the audience to just people who work on the field and not those who are generally interested or inclined towards environmental issues or the Western Ghats ecology. There were also some differences in opinion regarding the involvement of sponsors and partners and whether their logos should be displayed on the conclave website. We tried to resolve most of the grievances amicably but were unable to accept all the points offered. This might have upset some parties, but we had to keep true to our objectives and visualization of the conclave. Accommodating all opposing interests would have only jeopardized the successful completion of the conclave.

One of the major issues was tracing back the organizations and individuals who were a part of the 1987/88 march. Twenty five years had passed in the interim and a lot had changed in the civil society activism of the Western Ghats. Many of these organizations were localized and there were no websites or email ids registered. The postal addresses and phone numbers had also been changed multiple times which made it extremely difficult for us to trace these

organizations. We used every possible medium to circulate the news but mostly relied on word of mouth publicity to get some positive response. We managed to elicit some response from old marchers through our traditional means (emails, letters, networks, associations) and finally hosted nearly 50 old marchers from various states. Those marchers were from all walks of life and had come from various regions of the Western Ghats. It was not possible for us in spite of our best efforts to get more old marchers to participate. We did the best we could with the resources at our disposal and turned out with a satisfactory result.

Links of conclave related news articles

1. <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/event/29582>
2. <http://www.conservationindia.org/events/save-the-western-ghats-conclave-mahabaleshwar-nov-30-dec-2-2012>
3. <http://www.indiantribalheritage.org/?p=7482>
4. <http://www.indiaeveryday.in/finance/news-save-w-ghats-meet-to-focus-on-engaging-civil-societies-1266-4732679.htm>
5. <http://news.mumbaihikers.com/2012/10/save-western-ghats-conclave-2012-at.html>
6. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-07-16/pune/32697654_1_conclave-sustainable-development-civil-society
7. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-11-23/pune/35317966_1_western-ghats-civil-society-madhav-gadgil
8. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/ecomeet-in-mahabaleshwar-from-november-30-to-december-2/1036017>

Section III The Conclave



Section III The Conclave

1. Deliberations began..

On 30th Nov the air was filled with joy, festivity and hopes. It was the beginning of celebrations of 25 years of the Save the western Ghats March, dream of few committed foot soldiers of Western Ghats that began in 1987-88. Everyone at the beautiful setting of Mahabaleshwar MTDC Complex, a semi evergreen -moist deciduous forest of North Western Ghats, came to rejuvenate, reconnect, learn and enjoy and none was forgetting the responsibility and worries of fast developments in Western Ghats.

Meeting, exchanging and sharing was on the cards of everyone. Through painstaking efforts of our conclave team we could bring 34 Marchers of the historical campaign and these remarkable individuals, most of them continuing work in Western Ghats, were the main attraction. Various small events within the big group of 340 + participants began since 29th Nov. evening. The purpose of bringing people- biodiversity, forests and people, together was served and everyone was fresh and ready to commit further to the conservation of Western Ghats. Next three days were filled up with events, discussions, deliberations and small groups, corner meetings all with one motive to see the possibilities of working together, to see how and how much we can share collaborate, who are the new players, how to engage with them, listen to them. At the end of three days conclave again a beginning has been made to form and strengthen the partnerships with stakeholders beyond civil society and within the civil society, more professional view points and approaches were emerged and a certain and firm path has certainly opened up for the future of ***One and the only Western Ghats.***

2. Inauguration

The Inaugural session of the Conclave was intended to set the themes and the mood for all the deliberations which were to take place during 3 days of the Conclave. The day started with Jagar, a musical performance of the Mahadev Koli community from Bhimshankar Wild Life Sanctuary area. This folk performance was an ode to their ancestral land and their local deity. The

artists presented a local flavor of the Northern Western Ghats and with their spirited performance which carried the rustic flavor of their land set the mood for the beginning of the conclave.

The conclave has been inaugurated with the recital of a small Sanskrit prayer inviting deities and promoting nature worship. Mr. Anupam Mishra, eminent Gandhian who has been associated with Save the Western Ghats Movement since its inception in 1987-88, was chief guest and inaugurated the conclave. Mr. Pratim Roy, Director of Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri and Dr. Archana Godbole, Director, Applied Environmental Research Foundation also joined the inauguration panel to set the tone of the meeting and to provide background of the conclave to the audience. Mr. Roy as well as Dr. Godbole is member of revived Save the Western Ghats Movement group.

Dr. Archana Godbole welcomed the delegates to the beautiful hill station of Mahabaleshwar. She spoke of her deep emotional connect with the march of 1987/88 and credited the movement for her interest in working on issues of conservation in Western Ghats. The march gave her an opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life and helped her consciousness about the Western Ghats. She expressed her hopes that the conclave would help building new friendships and revive old ones. She greeted all the old marchers and thanked them for being a constant source of motivation for practitioners' in the field. Dr. Godbole also appealed the audience to participate deliberate and work towards long term collaborations and requested all to overcome the differences of opinions for the better future of Western Ghats.

Mr. Pratim Roy acquainted the audience with the trajectory of the Save the Western Ghats Movement since its revival in Goa in 2009. He said that this conclave is unique attempt as it included various options and methods of working in the Western Ghats which would bring diverse methodologies into the movement. He urged all participants to take part whole heartedly in the proceedings across the 3 days.

Mr. Anupam Mishra began his address by saluting the determined efforts of each person who had made an effort to be a part of the conclave. He said that,

each one, in their unique way, working to the best of their abilities, continue to strive towards a more and equitable development in the Western Ghats. He said that it is the efforts of thousands of people, who are just like the ones assembled at the conclave, that has made the Western Ghats get the attention of the world.



“The Western Ghats have recently been granted the status of a World Heritage Site. But, we as Indians do not have a history of maintaining such heritage structures. This lack of concern for heritages has become a part of our psyche now. It is reflected in all our actions, right from desecrating the walls of cultural heritages, to building dams over mighty, flowing rivers, natural heritages.”

He talked about the continuous tension that has been going on about the definition of development. While each person talks of development, there are too many disagreements about what this kind of development should entail. It is imperative for us to ponder why our entire political prowess and all our economic strength are only attracted towards the development that only oppresses and deprives. He talked about the callous definition of mainstream which helps in deepening the divide between man and nature. This

mainstream attempts at homogenizing beliefs, cultures, practices and gives no value to diversity and difference. From this notion of mainstream, stems the terminology ‘Adivasi’. This term is loaded with the idea that the “Adivasi” is less than those of us in the mainstream, is less endowed, less cultured and less developed. We need to introspect and look into us, to cleanse ourselves of these stereotypes which we propagate. Let us not think that, working for Adivasis is an attempt to civilize them or develop them.

He said that these members of the Indigenous communities have lived in the setting of the Western Ghats since ages. They have lived, worked and understood the environment much better than those of us who claim to be a

part of the mainstream. They have used the resources at their disposal and have made a sustainable life out of it since years. And importantly they have made more just laws. These laws are actually a reflection of the life values that they endorse. Each activity of theirs is to protect the environment but they do not waste time in speaking about it. They do want laurels for the work they do. They do it, because of their deep rooted connection with the physical world. Mr. Mishra urged the audience to work not for fame, laurels and adulation but be guided by a larger purpose of saving the environment.

He advised the audience to seek caution while debating development projects. More than often it happens that attempts to mitigate damages by one development project, leads to projects which cause even more destruction. The destruction that has been done to the environment is too immense to be rectified in one generation. We also have to guide our future generations so that they can speak up for the environment.

Mr. Mishra's inspiring address touched on many issues. His invocation to remove the value judgments' and loaded beliefs on indigenous communities and their cultures found favor with the delegates. His ideas about letting ones work do the talking is what a practitioner should strive for at all points. The idea of being as unique as individual streams yet working towards a larger collective goal was a metaphoric presentation of the ideals of the Save

“There have been many discoveries of species of animals, fish, insects in the Western Ghats. Have you ever heard of any classification in any other form of life, which terms them backward? This classification is only present among us humans. And it is probably the root of all evils.”

the Western Ghats practitioner's Conclave 2012. Mr. Mishra's humble and coherent address touched a chord with each member present and set the tone for the days ahead. It was a pleasure for us to have such a luminous personality speak amongst us and share the call to duty.

Sessions on Day 1

1.1 Western Ghats-UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Western Ghats have been in news since last couple of years. The recent status of World Natural Heritage site has been a concern of civil society for two reasons. One its effectiveness for conservation and second its impacts on communities and process of development in Western Ghats. Therefore a session has been organized at the conclave to deliberate on these concerns. This first session on the UNESCO heritage site began with tracing the journey which finally culminated in the Western Ghats of India being accorded the status of a World Heritage Site. This tag came after a sustained campaign by many conservationists and is a huge step towards propelling the issues of the Western Ghats into the global gaze.

“The Western Ghats can be envisaged as a necklace of exquisite beauty. Each bead of the necklace represents, a site of extreme species richness. The beauty of the necklace is revealed when every bead is in its place. Just like that each site plays a role in making the Western Ghats, a world heritage site”

Mr. V. B Mathur



Dr. V.B Mathur, Dean, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun presented the details of the journey and responsibilities, the status posed on all stakeholders towards the designated Natural World Heritage sites in this first session of the conclave. His main focus was on the implications, challenges and the way ahead after this designation. Thirty nine sites of the Western Ghats have been designated as World heritage site but there is a scope for the inclusion of more sites. Earlier, the states of Goa and Gujarat were not involved in this procedure but in the recent past have expressed interest to be a part of it. He stressed the importance of world heritage sites and said that it includes

‘only the best of the best’ and its natural or cultural significance is almost impossible to find anywhere.

Therefore, there is a lot of competition worldwide to attain this status. This coveted designation indicates that the countries house heritages of exquisite beauty and importance and take steps to preserve this heritage. The lobbying to get this designation for the Western Ghats started in the year 2006. The Western Ghats is globally regarded as one of the 8 ‘hottest hotspots of biodiversity’ which means that it is home to immense biological diversity. The Western Ghats is a large area and identifying the unique areas was a challenging task. So the area was divided into 7 sub-clusters. Thirty nine sites were identified for their species richness and the provision of serial nominations (dispersed unit nomination) was used. The most unique and biodiversity rich areas of the Western Ghats lie in Kerala and therefore 19 out of 39 sites are in Kerala. Ten sites in Karnataka, 6 sites are in Tamil Nadu and 4 sites are in Maharashtra. Each site identified and designated is unique, but its uniqueness is best experienced when it is seen in unison with the other sites. He initiated a discussion about how this inscription can be related to development and how it can benefit the local living around these sites. People need to understand that the UNESCO cannot dictate any terms to the local people after the inscription. However, it is the responsibility of the state and the local people, to safeguard the biodiversity and the pristine natural beauty of these areas.

He informed that the local people should decide the nature of tourism to be developed in the area. Unmitigated tourism will ruin the natural sanctity of these areas. The challenge before us should be to ensure ‘Inter-generational equity’. The challenge is that peoples’ livelihoods should be enhanced without the resources being degraded. A good way of ensuring livelihood generation using the heritage site status is by ‘Ecosystem Value services’ where local communities are given remuneration for their services towards protecting the environment. This is a form of compensating the people who spend their lives trying to preserve the environment.

The audience was full of questions about the process, how to integrate other beads in the necklace, how to involve local communities in planning and protection and most of the questions address the confusions being developed at natural heritage sites like Kaas plateau. The discussions on the UNESCO tag lingered around throughout the day among participants' corner meetings and sharing.

1.2 Learning from Movements

If one wants to bring about a change, there needs to be inspiration, struggle and motivation. Each movement that has happened in the Western Ghats has a story of its own and it is important for us to learn from the strategies and the campaigns of successful environmental movements. This session provided an opportunity to the delegates of the conclave to hear about the hugely successful Silent valley campaign and the Plachimada struggle against the giant Coca-Cola company.

Prof. M.K Prasad organized and lead the pioneering Silent Valley Movement in early 1980 with the Kerala Sashttra Sahitya Parishad. The silent valley movement proved to be an inspiration for the Save the Western Ghats March and movement. Dr. M.K. Prasad narrated the story for the participants and even today many young participants were overwhelmed by hearing the same. The Silent Valley agitation was pitted against the Kerala State Electricity Board who had proposed to construct a 240 MW hydro-electric project over the Kuntipuzha river. The silent valley is home to many endemic species and is completely uninhabited and exists in its untouched, pristine form. The Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) which gave primary importance to objective and scientific knowledge, presented hard facts and showed that 530 hectares of this pristine forest would be destroyed due to the project. It was difficult for the administration to take this opposition seriously because there were not too many people being harmed. But the agitation was the first instance where the cause of only the environment was cited as a reason to stall a development activity. The project was disbanded in the year 1980 and in 1984, it was declared as a National Park. This activism by KSSP changed the way environmental clearances are granted in this country. Mr. M. K Prasad has

inspired generations of activists to fight for the environment and speak up against the negative effects of large development projects.

Mr. R. Ajayan is the Convener of the Plachimada Solidarity Committee. He spoke about the agitation in the small hamlet of Plachimada in the Pallakad district of Kerala , where the villagers took down a mighty corporate giant and helped maintain their lives and political autonomy. The Coca Cola plant was drawn by the water rich nature of the taluka and had opened a bottling plant in the hamlet. They were sanctioned to produce 5,61,000 liters of cola everyday, where one liter of cola requires 2.5 liters of water. The ground water levels in the village started depleting and the water became unfit for human consumption and domestic use. It was then that the people took up the cudgels in their own hands and started massive protests, rallies and agitations against the company. The Plachimada Solidarity Committee helped mobilize people and collectively express their opposition to the project. After many more years of struggle, reports of pesticides being found in the bottled drinks and legal interventions, the company stopped its work in the year 2004.

1.3 Western Ghats and the Urban

Post- Lunch, the audience gathered for one of the most awaited sessions of the day. The audience turned out in good numbers beating the lull following a heavy, sumptuous lunch.

The Western Ghats are dotted with urban areas and also seeing a rapid increase in the number of 'hill cities' it houses. Keeping in mind this important fact, it was imperative to initiate a discussion that moves away from linking Western Ghats solely to the rural areas and tries to understand the nature of urbanism in this terrain. Mr. Somnath Sen, Consultant at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS), Bangalore facilitated the session and highlighted the importance of engaging with urban issues in the Western Ghats. He threw open the session to understand how urbanization has played out in the terrain, how it stands in contrast to issues of conservation and how it can be harnessed to protect the Western Ghats. The rate of urbanization in the Western Ghats is greater than the national average and nearly 50-60% of the Western Ghats is

urban. It is surprising that in spite of this, there is not much attention given to the issues of urbanism in the Western Ghats. Ms. Kavita Wankhede from IIHS and Mr. Rajiv Raman, an independent researcher working on urban waste management were other panelist of the session.

Ms. Kavita Wankhede gave an interesting presentation on the trends of urbanization in the Western Ghats since independence and talked about the centrality of urban areas in the region. In her presentation it was pointed out there are 62 cities in the Western Ghats with a population of more than 1 lakh and the total population

of these cities exceeds 47 million. Apart from these there are 700 smaller urban areas in the Western Ghats. Some of the environmental impacts of such rapid urbanization include intense consumption of resources, huge amounts of wastes, loss of biodiversity etc. She also spoke of the confusion in defining an urban space and expressed the need to work towards more sustainable forms of urbanization.

Mr. Rajiv Raman spoke of the huge amounts of urban solid and liquid waste which is generated routinely. He said that the amount of waste generated in a year can be considered to be equivalent to 60% of the capacity of the Koyna water reservoir.

“Far from being a sustainable city, Lavasa cannot even be considered to be a city. It is very low density, has high amounts of energy and water wastage. But most importantly it is not inclusive and is clearly not diverse. At best, it is a township, but certainly not a city”



Dr. V. Gandhimati in a pertinent question mentioned that it is not just a question of thinking about the environment but also a moral obligation to think about waste management. She said that it is unethical for waste from the urban areas to be dumped in rural areas. She said instead of preaching people

in villages to be more sustainable, people in the cities should first try to make their lives and lifestyles more sustainable.

Mr. Jayant Kandharkar from Thane gave a good example of exemplary work by administrative officials in the district. The district collector of Thane supported plantation of Turmeric in barren lands which helped generate jobs in the area. He said that these opportunities help in controlling migration towards urban areas. As usual the reactions and thinking, deliberations continued in the groups after the session and the setting of MTDC was a perfect one with lots of trees, paths and natural sit outs.

1.4 E-Dialogues Part 1

Through this gathering a conscious effort was made to make the participants, supporters and enthusiasts commit for responsible action to ***Save the one and only Western Ghats***. The Conclave was an attempt to bring together various



stakeholders in order to discuss pressing ecological, economic and social issues leading to sustainable solutions and strategies for the region. The Conclave envisaged carving new partnerships, strengthening the existing ones & developing concrete long term action plans for sustainable development in the

Western Ghats. While preparing for this conclave and this being practitioner's space we received many requests for the sessions small slots to present at discuss , by organizations and individuals doing outstanding work in their areas and sites and wanted the insight from others, craving to share and learn refine more through the conclave deliberations. Therefore specific Environmental dialogues session has been organized as parallel session and received huge response.

E dialogue session of the conclave was designed to be a platform where the assembled delegates could showcase their work and form more partnerships to carry forward their ideals. This was a space for people to share their

experiences and stories. There were a host of issues which were discussed in this session across 2 days ranging from waste management, forest restoration to environmental education.

Ms. Parineeta Dandekar of SANDREP, gave a presentation of living rivers in the Western Ghats and the severe damage that is being done to their flow due to unmitigated development activities. She placed crucial importance on treating rivers not just as a natural resource but as an entity which holds together cultural beliefs and values. She said that Rs. 70,000 crore has been spent on building large dams but the irrigation has increased by 0.1%. Seventeen new dams are being constructed only for Mumbai and these have been declared as 'benign beneficiaries' as they are intended to provide drinking water. Therefore, these dams do not even have to follow the basic procedure of going through an Environment Impact Assessment. The 70 km Chalakudy river in Athirapilly, Kerala has already been broken 7 times by big and small dams. She presented the crucial fact that 89% of dams perform less than their designed capacity. She drew attention towards the increasing intensity of the peoples' movements and also the attitude of dismissing them as empty activism. All the projects which have been shelved till date have been due to peoples' active protest. Therefore, at this juncture, we cannot belittle peoples' agitations.

Mr. Shrinivas Gogate is a Chartered Accountant from Mumbai but is an example to many because of his passion and will to work for the environment. He works in the coastal areas of Ratnagiri district near his native place. He has planted 1000 trees along the Ratnagiri -Pavas road which is otherwise barren and on the lateritic plateau. He has been maintaining them for 3 years. Through his small Foundation, he is trying to engage the school children in the care of plantation throughout the year. The survival rate of the trees is nearly 90%. He has also organized summer camps with 850 students who participate from all over Maharashtra and Karnataka. These students worked for couple of years and helped restore a local river which had been filled with sediment and waste. Villagers are benefitted due to the water and use the water for their mango orchards. The clear message from Mr. Gogate's presentation is *put hands in the soil and work at grassroots to make difference*. Such stories and

small localized experiments are eye-opener to those who are lost at the question what can I do and inspiring to many others who are struggling to fulfill their passion of conservation.

1.5 Down Memory Lane

As the day drew to a close, the excitement among the audience increased. The day was to close with the highlight of the Conclave. The evening saw young and old audience members assembling for the final event of the day where they could meet the old marchers of 1987/88.

Marchers from different regions

gathered to meet old friends and acquaintances, and were looking forward to learn from the new torchbearers and share their stories of the historic march.

The only thing that can be considered to be the best attribute of the past, is that it informs and shapes the present and the future. This Conclave surely was an attempt to fix goal posts for the future and share strategies to reach those goal posts. But, amidst these lofty goals, it was also necessary to take a moment, pause and reflect on the days gone by. It was crucial to learn from the experiences of the veterans of the march of 1987/88. It was also important

"The Save the Western Ghats March was the primary reason ,why I chose to continue working on environmental issues.

Otherwise the direction of my life would have been different."

Mr. C. D Suneesh, Core Marcher,



to celebrate their dedication, their persistent efforts and their continued involvement with the concerns of the Western Ghats. With these ideas in mind, we conducted the special session 'Down Memory Lane' which provided space and time to interact

with the marchers of 1987/88. This was an opportunity for many long lost friends to unite, to reminiscence the days of heady activism and to share stories with each other about the changes which have taken place in the interim of 25 years.

Although we established contacts with nearly 70 old marchers, we hosted 32 of them at the Conclave. We must remember that many of the veteran marchers are now in their late 80s and early 90s and physically infirm to travel. These marchers had come from the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and had brought with them lots of memorabilia from the days gone by. There were old pamphlets, brochures, song books, map routes and lots of photographs on display. The marchers enthusiastically shared their stories with the gathered audience. It was all extempore, spontaneous and from the heart.



Mr. Abhilash Khandekar, Chief Editor, Western Region, Dainik Bhaskar group headed the felicitation ceremony. There were some core marchers present who had walked for the greater part of 100 days. There were also members of the central committee of the March like Mr. S.R Hiremath who was also the focal point of the Karnataka leg of the march. Mr. Ranjan Rao Yerdoor was the state coordinator of the Karnataka for the SWGM of 1987-88. Mr. Saravanan and Mr. Venkatachalam were the focal points of the Tamil Nadu leg of the march. Mr. Venkatachalam who is 90 years of age, enthusiastically travelled from Pondicherry to Mahabaleshwar and interacted with all his old activist friends, who he met after a long time. There were also members like Dr. Jay

“As a professor of Sociology, I can honestly say that, I have learnt more from this march, than I have learnt while attaining multiple degrees.”

Dr. Anuradha Samant

Samant who had seen the march evolve from merely being an idea to taking shape, generating interest and changing the course of activism in the Western Ghats.

Dr. Jay Samant narrated the story of the inception of the march and shared with the audience the chronology of events which led to this idea translating into reality. He recollected the many conversations, brain storming sessions and long discussions with many of his fellow nature lovers. He said that there were

many logistics issues, at times food was short in supply and there were adverse weather conditions. But there was not one person who complained or lost his enthusiasm. There were no professional marchers in the group but all were united by a deep seated commitment to conserve the ecology of the Western Ghats.

Dr. Anuradha Samant had been a backbone of organization and logistics of the march In Kolhapur district. She spoke about the fond memories of late Mr. Jagdish Godbole, the inspiration behind the march and his whole hearted efforts as northern coordinator of the march.

There were many marchers who were in their ripe old age and were eager to share their experiences on stage. There were a lot of funny anecdotes narrated on stage and a lot of memories shared about friends and fellow nature lovers who were a part of this journey.

Dr. Archana Godbole, who was the Convener of the SWG Conclave, 2012 was a young marcher during 1987/88. She spoke about how her involvement in the march made a deeper connect and helped her realize her passion for working for the conservation of forests and biodiversity in Western Ghats. She said that though the work in the march was hectic, it was an opportunity for many people to realize their love for the Western Ghats and commit their lives to its protection.

The audience was touched by the narration of Mr. Shivaji Kagnekar from Belgaom (Karnataka) . A simple humble Kagnekar walked in Karnataka 25 years ago. Since then he has been inspired to resolve the issue of indiscriminate cutting and destruction of forests for fire wood and house hold needs. To address the issue he has developed the skills to convince people for bio gas plants and so far within last 25 years erected more than 1000 bio gas plants in more than 40 villages/ hamlets. Through his simple narrative he became the centre or attraction and source of inspiration to many youngsters at the conclave.

Mr. Somnath Gavas from Chandgad Kolhapur district supported the Marchers in his area and organized villagers from six villages around Chandgad to participate in the campaign. He came to the conclave with few of his villagers-fellow marchers. He expressed the deep concerns about the dwindling forests in his area and new wave of development in the form of tourism and land grab for monoculture plantations. He expressed the need of institutional support and showed readiness of local communities to support any endeavors to deal with such current issues. He spontaneously wrote an article about the 25 years of SWGM and the conclave, in the local Marathi Newspaper and shared some interesting stories of long walks from the forests during the March.

Each Marcher of the SWGM 987-88 was felicitated with a memento and a gift on behalf of Save the Western Ghats Group. Mr. Abhilash Khandekar who presided the felicitations, urged that it is never too late to be a part of a noble cause. He said that the 25th year celebrations of the march have also seen a lot of new members coming into the fold of the movement. He expected that *the coming together of veterans and their wisdom and newcomers and their enthusiasm, will only make the movement more potent and strong.*





The sessions of the previous day had given the participating delegates an idea of what was to be expected in the days to come. The splendidly organized Down Memory Lane session had introduced them to many selfless people who for more than 3 decades have been relentlessly pursuing the vision of protecting the Western Ghats. The expectations had increased and so had the questions and opinions in the mind of the participants. The second day promised to be more insightful and inclusive than the first day. All the varied ideas, suggestions and expectations had to accommodate and more space had to be given to people to express and opine. With many such ideas in mind, the proceedings of the day started at around 9am. The day was to be celebrated as the Indigenous Day and was to host a unique food festival which added to the excitement of the day. The day was also to be celebrated with a civil society networking workshop which lay at the heart of the idea of organizing a stakeholders Conclave. The session was intended to provide the delegates with guiding blocks which would help them collaborate on issues and solutions through their work.

2 .Celebration of Indigenous Communities Day and Indigenous Food Festival

One of the target groups of this Conclave were the members of various Indigenous communities from across the Western Ghats. These are the people who live a life which is deeply connected to nature and have a strong spiritual relationship with the physical world around them. They are the people who bear the direct|brunt of skewed development and whose social and cultural life is perennially under threat. They stand to lose their forests, their fields, their cultural norms and values and most critically their political autonomy. But, it is also a fact that they understand nature like an outsider can never do. They do not have an objective relationship with nature, but a bond that comes from generations of reverence and respect. It was imperative for us to understand the Western Ghats through the perspectives of the members of these communities to get a more inclusive and holistic idea. We also worked with Indigenous Partnerships for Agro-biodiversity and local food sovereignty to host an Indigenous Food Festival. Food festivals are potent ways of generating awareness about local resources, local food traditions, and use. It is a chance for the tribal communities to both market their produce and reclaim their food

“The day you lose your food, you lose your biodiversity. The day you lose your biodiversity, you lose your land . And the day you lose your land, you lose your political autonomy.”

*Mr. Phrang Roy
Indigenous Partnerships*

cultures which are intrinsically tied to their food security. The food practices of an area also reflect on the agricultural biodiversity of the area. Therefore, we aimed at creating a knowledge base for indigenous food cultures and help the tribal communities market their produce at the conclave.

The second day of the Conclave i.e. the Indigenous Day celebrations were kicked off with some villagers of Bhimashankar, Maharashtra with one more variety of their traditional folk music called Jagar. 'Jagar' is a traditional art form that uses music as a medium of storytelling. It taps into the rich traditional folklore of indigenous communities and also highlights the oral

dissemination of knowledge and local history. The group presented a humorous rendition of a story from the Ramayana which was received to great applause by the audience. Music is a medium which speaks a lot about the traditional knowledge, histories and the relationship with nature which the members of indigenous communities have believed and preserved since ages. Therefore it was an apt beginning to a day where the focus was on bridging the gap between indigenous knowledge and scientific advancements.



Dr. Archana Godbole, Director AERF, started the session by flagging off some key issues which put the role of the indigenous communities in the quest of conservation in perspective. She was joined on stage by Dr.Snehalata Nath, Director, Keystone Foundation and Mr. Phrang Roy, Co-coordinator of Indigenous Partnerships for Agro-Biodiversity and Food Sovereignty.

Mr. Roy was the first speaker in the session and spoke about the changing trend being the world over, where the rights of the indigenous communities to preserve their own language, their culture, cuisine and above all their right to self determination are gaining credence. He said that traditional knowledge of the indigenous communities which has often been ridiculed and treated dismissively is now being considered as a repertoire of wisdom which cannot be treated with indifference. As a member of the Khasi indigenous community of Meghalaya, he expressed his solidarity with the communities of the Western Ghats and supported the initiative of the Food Festival. The problems being faced by all the communities across India are essentially the same and it is extremely important to stand together in solidarity at such critical juncture. He pointed out the crisis associated with climate change, the commercialization of food, the lack of trust in governance and the blind quest towards a life which is inspired by a Western idea of development. He stressed on the fact that in today's world when there is a need for sustainability in growth and

development, the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities is much more important than ever before. The idea of food festivals is to reconnect with one's land and revitalize the biodiversity of the region.

Learning from other Food Festivals

Mr. Allan Walhang, a lecturer from St. Edmunds College, Shillong spoke about the recent Indigenous Food Festival conducted in Shillong which attracted a massive audience. Through a small documentary he showcased the festival 'Granaries of Memory' and talked about its influence on the younger members of the Indigenous communities. This month long food festival was a huge catalyst for them to reclaim their own traditions and come to terms with their importance in this globalized world. This food festival helped in the dissemination of a lot of knowledge about Indigenous practices and local agro-biodiversity. This was also an opportunity for practitioners' in the Western Ghats to learn from the experiences of the North-East.

The most important part of the first session of the Indigenous Day celebrations were the addresses by the members of the Indigenous communities.

Mr. Rangaswamy, a member of the Irula community of Nilgiris, who participated in the food festival and Mr. Dharma Lobhi of Thakar community from Barshet, Raigad district presented the perspective of the local communities towards the issues of food sovereignty and biodiversity conservation in the Western Ghats. Mr. Rangaswamy from the Erode district of Tamil Nadu is a cultivator engaged in millet farming. He spoke about the nutritional value of the millets that are cultivated in this area. He said that the members of his community find millets to be more nutritious than rice but the Public Distribution System (PDS) does not promote millet cultivation. Therefore, they are finding it increasingly difficult to continue this production. As a means of promoting millets, his group was going to present nearly 7 items from the locally produced millets in the food festival.

Mr. Dharma Lobhi spoke about the availability of various kinds of minor produce and fruits from the forest and how the Indigenous communities came to be deprived of this produce due to the depletion of the forests. Such forest based collection was a main supplement to their diet till few years ago. He spoke about the apathy of the forest department which does not consider their knowledge and their expertise in managing their own resources of any value. He said that their indigenous knowledge can at any point be compared to the highly superficial knowledge of the government by just seeing the quality of the trees planted by them. While the trees planted by the locals continue to flourish for years, the forest department trees have to be replanted every year.

In response to impressive speeches and stories of these two, many of participating members of the Indigenous communities spoke vocally about the way they perceive nature, their traditional approaches towards conservation and protection of forests and their relationship with the forest officials. The impact of these personal narrations on the dais cannot be compared to an outsider presenting their perspective based on research. The audience understood the rationale behind the organization of a Food Festival in the conclave that aimed to speak about issues of conservation. This rationale was put forward and expressed lucidly by the members of indigenous communities who face the brunt of the 'Development' paradigm. Certain issues are well beyond the realm of theory and only a lived experience is needed to highlight

the starkness of it. These narrations propelled the audience to think beyond the issues that are routinely discussed and put into perspective the idea of indigenous food cultures as a means of Biodiversity Conservation.



Slow Food is an international organization that speaks against the culture of fast food and standardized food. It is a social movement against the changing forms of food in the globalized world and promotes biodiversity. Ms. Anandi Soans from Slow Food International (India) spoke about the need for people to look inwards for better food practices and promote local and natural food production and consumption. She spoke about Slow Food's role in promoting indigenous food cultures. She also informed people that the 2014 Indigenous Terra Madre (Global Food Festival) was going to be conducted in Shillong, which would put India also in the reckoning in reclaiming indigenous food cultures.

Dr. Minoo Parabia from Surat addressed a different aspect of Indigenous knowledge and spoke about the medicinal plants of the Daang region of Gujarat. He said that the GEER Foundation along with the help of 7 universities conducted a survey and found 1275 different species of medicinal plants in Gujarat. He also threw light on the hill millets which are mostly gluten free and the immense nutritional value that they possess. Sadly, the cultivation of millets is gradually decreasing in the Dangs. He also spoke about the gap between the producers and the buyers for medicinal plants because of which this immense potential cannot be adequately tapped.

2.1 The Food Festival

In the forest like surroundings of the MTDC , the food stalls were organized in the open areas behind the conclave area. There were a total of six stalls which together exhibited nearly 30 different dishes and traditional drinks. Apart from these there were dry food stalls and handicrafts stalls by the various communities. All these 6 stalls, prepared fresh food and displayed it for sale. All the dishes were moderately priced and the audience had been provided with a coupon of Rs. 25 so that they could purchase any dish of their choice. The food festival carried on for 4 hours and all the stalls managed to sell off every cooked item from their table. It was a resounding success and was appreciated by all gathered for the Conclave.

The members of the Paniya community from Ruchie Farmers Network, Wayanad presented a dessert made from bamboo rice. They also presented

spiced Jackfruit fries with pepper chutney. Also for sale were Jackfruit Papads, Bamboo Shoot Chatni Powder and Bamboo Rice Iddu. Bamboo and jackfruit were the primary raw products that the Ruchie Farmers Network presented.

Apart from the Food stalls, there were five other stalls set up by the members of the Indigenous communities. These stalls had put on display dry food items and small craft items by the participating members. The Tribal Foundation from Kanyakumari sold a variety of chips made from Banana and Tapioca. They also sold locally produced cashew nuts and spices like clove and cardamom. They also had small beads, bracelets, keychains and necklaces made from seashells which they had carried from Kanyakumari.

The tribal communities from Nilgiris along with the Keystone foundation had set up a stall which sold locally produced Honey and Soaps. They also sold handmade cloth bags and shawls.

The Ruchie Farmers Network had set up a stall which sold small craft items made of bamboo. They also sold candles, soaps and items like Jackfruit papad and sweets.

The group from Konkan had also set up a stall where they sold mango pulp juice. Papads and a variety of pickles.

The indigenous communities from Nilgiris like Irula, Kurumba presented seven different millet based preparations and a host of dry food items on sale. Their curd rice with chutney, Ragi Murraku, Kambu sweet and Thene Laddu were greatly appreciated by the audience. In keeping with their primary cultivation, millets based items were showcased in their stalls. Apart from that they had a handicrafts stall which sold a variety of handmade cloth bags and trinkets.

The Soliga community from Karnataka made a wonderful presentation of the minor forest produce which is consumed by the tribals on a daily basis. They presented a juice made from roots of edible plants and presented a plate of

assorted tubers (*Dioscoriea pentaphylla*), green leaves and roots which were fried and served with a tuber pickle. The items which they put up for presentation included edible fruits of *Dimocarpus longan* (*Gudagan jagadi*) which belongs to the family of *Sapindaceae*.

The Tribal Foundation from Kanyakumari used tapioca and local herbs as the main ingredients of their preparations. They presented a Herbal tulsi (basil) tea which was a hot seller at the festival. They also prepared Kollutai which is a baked item made of rice flour, spices, sugar and herbal leaves. Apart from these they served baked tapioca with chutney and had a variety of banana and tapioca chips, cardamom, cloves etc. for sale.

The Kani tribal community inhabits the forests of Kanyakumari in Agasthyamalai ranges in the Western Ghats. Once a nomadic tribe, they have settled in the deep forests and jungles. They draw their livelihood and sustenance from forest resources and their entire life revolves round forest ecology. The staple food is Tapioca. They also cultivate a wild paddy strain called Karai- Nel. But owing to human versus animal conflict, the community is not concentrating on these cultivations in large scale.



They cultivate Banana, Tubers, Coconut, Areca nut and Cashew nut, Rubber, Spices, Silk cotton and Vegetables. Owing to man animal conflict, agro-forestry is facing many serious questions. Tribal Foundation is seeking alternative

avenues to avoid the conflict. Kanis consume Mango and Jack-Fruit collected from the wild and extract Wine from some species of Palms. They gather mushrooms and wild honey and hunt small animals such as rabbit, tortoise, white rat, mouse-deer, bats and Birds using nets, traps and noose.

They have a rich knowledge of ethno-botany, that they treat diseases with the indigenous form of *Siddha*. Tribal Foundation is serving them to develop their economic, social, cultural, environmental status and protect the precious forest ecology of the Western Ghats by creating environmental awareness. This Food Festival was an opportunity for the foundation to showcase this rich culinary and cultural heritage of the Kani community.

The Mahadev Koli group from Bhimashankar presented the Dangar Bhakar made with rice flour and pumpkin stuffing. They had also prepared a traditional dish called Kakad PISOI which uses Cucumber as the primary ingredient. They also presented these fresh vegetables from their villages at the stall. The group from Konkan represented the local community, Kunbi. They presented many fried delicacies made from rice flour and an aromatic drink called Solkadi (from *Garcinia indica* fruits) which was hugely appreciated by the audience. The Kokan group of women presented local foods of the Western Coastal region of Maharashtra and main ingredient is coconut, making food tasty.

In all a total of 300 conclave participants attended the food festival. They were present for the highly informative opening session of the Indigenous Communities Day and took part in the Food Festival with a lot of enthusiasm.



Day 2 Other sessions

2.2 Civil Society Networking Workshop

At the heart of the Practitioners' Conclave lies the idea of enabling the civil society to join hands and fight for the cause of the Western Ghats. The Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot is spread over 6 states which have different languages, cultures and issues. Similarly, there are different successes and failures with respect to environmental activism in each of these areas over the period of time. But, within all these diversities, there is the common goal to conserve and protect the environment and guarantee a better life for the people who are dependent on the Western Ghats. With globalization, new wave of professionalism in activism and civil society the ways to deal with issues and to work as a collective force has also changed. While there have been small networking initiatives throughout the Western Ghats, there is the need to institutionalize and formalize these networks. There have been several such examples of mountain networks which have been functioning successfully all over the world. Recently, there has been such an initiative in the Himalayas and we believed that sharing the experience of such networking could benefit the gathered audience. The problems faced by hill communities are almost the same across India. Their forests are taken away from them; they are further deprived with the promise of development and are bearing the direct brunt of environmental damage.

Therefore a specific session focusing on civil society networks and initiatives and their role in translating thoughts into something more concrete and attainable has been organized. This session helped the participant civil society members working across states and across issues to converge at one platform and share their experiences, successes and failures. This networking exercise has been an attempt to reinstall the vigor in civil society activism by strengthening ties, building new ones and amending disjuncture. This session provided a concrete base to make new allies and friends who are as supportive of your cause and with whose help the idea, your aims move closer towards fulfillment. This is the forum where theories can translate into practice and where practice can perpetuate into success.

The chief speaker in the session was Mr. Pushkin Phartiyal, Executive Director, Central Himalayan Environment Association (CHEA), Nainital. They are now involved in trying to bring all the mountain states and mountain people together to form a network called the '**Indian Mountain Initiative**'. He started his presentation by saying the field learning's' have to be taken up to the policy level so that there can be a larger scale of intervention. This transition can only be aided by networking efforts and this gives networking its crucial importance. 28% of the World forests are found in mountainous areas and every 12th person can be considered to be a hill native³.

It has to be recognized that there is no collective hill agenda in India and there is no unified political viewpoint for hill states. While speaking specifically of the Himalayas, he said that out of 28 states in India, 11 are Himalayan hill states. The Ganga basin emerging from the Himalayas sustains 500 million people across India. Therefore, the repercussions of damage to mountains will not be limited just to people of those states but also to the country in general.

The Indian Mountain Initiative (IMI) is a civil society based movement which includes all stakeholders and that includes both members of the government and political parties along with civil society members. There are 2 summits which IMI organizes annually. 'The Sustainable Mountain Development Summit' is held at the beginning of the year where people make presentations about the issues in their area. Some of the topics which have been discussed in



the previous summits include Community Forestry, Tourism and Hydro-electric power. The focus now is on the idea of institutionalizing this initiative and putting it across to all the stakeholders. They are now looking at projecting IMI as a collective ownership of all stakeholders rather

than just being a CHEA initiative. CHEA wants to model it as functional discussion platform where free discussions and informed dialogue can be

³FAO report

facilitated. The second meet which is conducted by the IMI is the 'Meet of the Indian Mountain states' conducted in Delhi. This meet is meant to release the outcome of the previous summit and again provide space for thematic discussions. The selection of Delhi as the venue enabled them to get more participation from people who can influence policy and bring about political changes.

Mr. Phartiyal said that while it is imperative for all to go back to the field and learn and reassess situations, one should keep the larger picture in mind. One crucial component of networking is liasoning with the policy makers and the political representatives who can crystallize best practices and bring about

Mountain Cell at MoEF

The efforts of IMI, seems to have played an important role in influencing administrative attitudes towards mountain states. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has set up a new mountain cell. This cell is going to be conducting the International Mountain Day celebrations this year. Though a small step, it shows that networking and collective strength has the power to influence opinions at a policy level.

wider changes. IMI has tried to involve government participation in all the summits and discussions though it has never accepted funding from the government. This helps form informal ties with the administration which can help in pushing reforms ahead. Another learning drawn from this initiative is to strongly work towards reducing isolations between various communities in a mountain range. Instead of viewing a mountain range as a sum of various regions, it is always better to view it as a whole.

The most important part of the session was the suggestions that flowed from the floor of the house. There were questions

pertaining to the definition of mountain region which is the first step towards network formation. IMI follows the recommendation of the planning commission to define mountain regions. They have selected this definition keeping in mind that, their ultimate goals would be working with the planning

commission for policy changes. This is also a shield against rejection of newly minted definitions which regularly takes place in many quarters.

After this presentation there has been a debate on whether SWG movement should work as a formal network and to be institutionalized or not. Many of the activists suggested that the informal nature has been maintained and annual meetings should be continued.

Some important suggestions which were given during this session

- Continuing with the annual meetings of the SWG Movement but forming smaller thematic discussion groups. This would lead to more technical and in depth deliberations.
- Involve the media to the best possible capacity so as to facilitate dissemination of information.
- Make smaller NGOs speak up about their work and help them with logistical and technical support to work better at the grassroots level.
- Release newsletters documenting important work in the terrain every 6 months, so that everyone is kept abreast of the bigger changes.
- Network with the people in the fields as it is their opinion which remains most crucial. Form Eco-clubs or Green groups locally, where both children and adults can be sensitized.

However many corner discussions and smaller informal meetings among the various stakeholders and participants during the conclave, revealed there is a need to first understand the relevance of the extreme activism, collaborations and institutionalizing the movement or efforts of Saving the Western Ghats. The understanding and thoughts captured through interactions are discussed below.

2.3 Western Ghats and the Media

This session dealt with discussing the role the Media has been playing, in keeping the concerns and issues plaguing the Western Ghats in the public vision. In an increasingly impersonal and anonymous age, the media is our window to the world. The only way we can circulate information, disseminate ideas and generate interest in issues of the environment is through the media. But, the power of the media to create reality can often have dual repercussions. The media does not merely present facts but at times creates facts which can in turn change the way the issue is perceived and received. The Panelists of the session were Mr. Abhilash Khandekar, Chief Editor, Dainik Bhaskar group and a reputed journalist Mr. Alhad Godbole and educationist, Prof. Pendse.

Mr. Godbole began by saying that there is a growing trend in the media where every journalist wants to present something unique and something which stands out. This 'byte-crazy' journalism is a product of the market because of which the real essence of discussions and



opinions gets diluted and misquoted. Objective analysis of news stories is becoming rare in the present media and is inching towards mere perceptions. News without objective reporting is a lost cause. He then went on to speak about the manner in which, Western Ghats has been projected in the media. The reportage usually has been pertaining to major political controversies in the area but such news mostly neglects the bigger issues happening in this terrain. There are many opportunities in the media and even specific courses which are dedicated to Environment reporting. These opportunities should be utilized optimally by people who want to take up the media as a means of voicing the concerns of nature.

Prof. Pendse talked about the dwindling standards of information dissemination by the media. He urged the audience that all practitioners'

should personally contribute their work to the media instead of relying on the opinions of a person who is not well acquainted with the issue. Along with work, this should also be part of every practitioner's duties.

Mr. Abhilash Khandekar said that not many newspaper reporters or editors are aware of the recent political climate of the Western Ghats. It is because the people responsible for the circulation of the newspapers feel that their readers might not be interested in reading reports about the Western Ghats. Environment has become an important beat and there are still a lot of stories on the issue. There is a need to institutionalize and formalize the way in which Environmental Journalists are trained and sent to the field. He said that one must understand that many of the Environment reporters in the present day, are not completely aware of the things they are reporting. But, they still make an effort to learn more about it and present it to the audience. So, the responsibility should also be shared by the experts in the fields to guide the journalists and help them get proper information which could be disseminated to the audience. If the media is treated as a product, then content always has to be saleable. And the sales figures at all points are supposed to be high irrespective of the compromise with the quality.

There were many questions raised on the floor of the house about the way media has been silent on people's issues. It proved to be a session of deep introspection where the indispensability of the media was acknowledged. But, at the same time it was decided that the general public could also play a role in making the media more accountable.

2.5 Environment Dialogues Part 2

This session was designed to be a platform where the assembled delegates could showcase their work and form more partnerships to carry forward their ideals. This was a space for people to share their experiences and stories. The session carried on for 2 days and was held in parallel sessions. A total of 15 people gave their presentations and answered questions that were posed to them. There was a special session to talk about the work being done in the region of Mahabaleshwar, where the meeting was being conducted. Dr. Jared

Buono of Watershed Management Group discussed his work on spring water conservation in the area. He shared his innovative idea of low cost spring boxes which found much favor with the audience. Mona Patrao from Redstone Eco Farm, Mahabaleshwar talked about the use of tourism as a means of promoting sustainable lifestyles. She showed the delegates the work in her organic farm and the experiences of the children who routinely visit the farm. It is an opportunity to sensitize the younger generation to a more healthy and sustainable lifestyle.



Literature goes a long way in throwing light, creating awareness and bringing environmental concerns into the public focus. Though such endeavors might not be academic or activist in orientation, the lucidity of the written word can make an impact across the cross-section of society.

Therefore a separate session **A Literary Take** had been planned initially in the conclave. But due to time constraints and last minute cancellations of the presenters a full session could not be followed. One of the speakers Ms. Shaitinti Bose an author working on indigenous nature based stories talked to the participants in this session. Her perception gave different understanding into issues of the environment from the lenses of a writer.

Ms. Shaintoni talked about the role on literature as a medium and story-telling in particular to influence attitudes towards conservation. She also narrated a small story which she has narrated from book of trees especially for the conclave.

These presentations were opportunities for the people to not just give space to their work on a bigger platform but draw feedback from likeminded people. This feedback will certainly help them tie up the loose ends and draw inspiration from other success stories.

2.6 Public Interest Litigations and Legal Activism

Though this session was not initially a part of the scheduled sessions, there were many demands from the audience for such an interaction. Many of the organizations who were present at the Conclave had a lot of road blocks which they had to face in the course of their work on conservation. In most of the situations, dialogues between the opposing parties are not encouraged and damage to the environment goes on quite blatantly. In cases where dialogues do happen, there are chances of it not coming to any amicable end. In such situations, members of the civil society try other avenues to bring about an intervention. Some try mobilizing the people, while some try to bring about a political intervention. But, there are also many cases where both the people and the politicians are involved in the menace. Or they may just be indifferent towards the cause and consider it to be unimportant. In such cases, the best means to seek recourse is to approach the law. Legal activism is widely gaining credence as a potent tool in the hands of people. But there is still a lack of awareness about the way one needs to go ahead with it. Therefore, this impromptu session was of crucial importance to inform the delegates about the way to approach Public Interest Litigations (PILs) and also to share the stories of successful legal interventions.

This session was chaired by Dr. Jay Samant from Kolhapur. He selected a panel consisting of young and old activists who had taken up the legal way towards justice. The panel included Mr. S. R Hiremath, Founder, Samaj Parivartan Samuday, Dharwad, who is one of the first people to use the PIL route in the Western Ghats. He was joined by Ms. Hema Ramani from the Bombay Environmental Action Group and a young lawyer Mr. Guruprasad Malkar from Enviro-Legal forum, Kolhapur.

“With the help of Public Interest Litigation and proper use of the legal resources, we could seek a ban of mining in Bellary. In all of 12,000 hectares.”

Mr. S. R Hiremath

Mr. Hiremath said that PILs have been a central part of his 32 years of activism. It started in the 1983 when the Tungabhadra river was being polluted. The first

PIL was filed against the pollution of Tungabhadra river, water and air in the Karnataka high court. He said that the crucial strategy that one should remember is that, PILs should be treated as only a complementary measure. The main propelling force is mobilizing the people and getting them to voice their protest. Peoples' movement not only has to be strong but also has to be aided by scientific studies and media visibility. Only then the PIL can create the



impact it is intended to. The last PIL that Samaj Parivaratn Samuday was against the Bellary mining in Karnataka. Each of these PILs has been adequately supported by intensive scientific studies and strong peoples' movements. Mr. Hiremath said that in so many years of activism they have always tried to

work in close collaboration with the media. This media visibility has always helped the cause.

Ms.Hema Ramani told the audience that PILs should not be the first step in any environmental activism. If peoples' movements are strong, then there is no need for one to approach the court. One practical step she suggested was to write a report in extremely simple and lucid language so that it is easy to interpret by both the lawyers and the judges. She also cautioned the audience that once a case is rejected by the court, it gets very difficult to bring back attention to it. Therefore, it should be preceded by a lot of active lobbying in the field with an attempt to draw concrete results out of it.

Delegates also drew attention to the issues of police atrocities on environmental activists and asked the panel if legally these issues could be handled. Mr. Hiremath answered saying that though these questions can be answered legally; activists must also acknowledge the kind of power that they are fighting against. One of the key effective strategies while fighting against giant corporate firms is to be prepared well in advance and keep your networks of media and even legislators close to you. There were also questions about the amount of time involved in strengthening peoples' movements

before filing a PIL which might aggravate the situation at hand. A case in point can be environmental accidents. Mr. Hiremath answered saying that such cases can be immediately taken to court but undoubtedly will be a tough case to follow up. But there is a larger issue at hand and that includes sensitizing people to situations where there is the potential for environmental accidents to happen. People should understand the perils in the area whether through development projects or industrial units being set up in their areas. Guru Prasad Malkar gave a more specific answer by saying that such cases could be referred to the sub-divisional magistrate instead of going to the High Court. In such situations going to the high court would not be a good step.

In all these addresses, the audience found a way to connect to the idea of legal activism for environmental issues and also got information on the ways to go about it. It was practical information designed to help out practitioners' in their crusade.

Music at the Meet

Mr. Y. B Ramakrishnan is an old marcher from Karnataka. 25 years have passed since the march but his enthusiasm has not dulled one bit. Mr. Ramakrishna brought him many memorabilia which he presented and spoke about. But, the delegates shall remember him as the 'Music Man'. Whenever there was any time between the sessions, he started singing old songs from the march and usually got the entire audience to sing along with him. It was a delight to see people from various states, sing along to old, activist Kannada songs.



By the third day the news of the conclave had been reported in all major local newspapers. The people from nearby areas got an idea of the kind of proceedings in the Conclave and gathered at the venue to be a part of the event. A part of the reason also could be attributed to the fact that Prof. Madhav Gadgil, the chairman of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel was to address the audience. The influx of media personnel, environment lovers and local villagers increased at the venue on the third and the final day of the Conclave. The WGEEP report has created ripples in the political circles throughout the country and this was an opportunity for people to directly pose their questions to an esteemed panel. This feedback and increase in interest pointed to the fact that our agenda and objectives were being fulfilled and people were taking cognizance of our efforts.

Day 3 Sessions

3. Policy Bench on Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel report

The formation of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel under the stewardship of Prof. Madhav Gadgil in March 2010, was the beginning towards acknowledging the threat to the Western Ghats. It was also a hope for many that some institutional steps and measures would soon be taken to derail the practices of devastation being followed in this region. The Western Ghats are spread across 6 Indian states and are the social, cultural and financial security of many indigenous and rural communities residing here. The over exploitation of these mountains and rampant, mindless development efforts are directly affecting the biodiversity which has made the Western Ghats their home and the livelihoods of people, who are dependent on nature. These concerns were being aired by the Civil Society Groups working in this area for a long time. They were constantly trying to bring the issues concerning the Western Ghats to the public gaze, to the limelight so that it can draw the attention of the authorities and capture the consciousness of the masses. After years of lobbying and single minded effort, their endeavors' paid off resulting in the formation of this expert panel. But, that was just the beginning of a long journey and there is still a long way to go towards a fruitful end. The Save the Western Ghats group also provided critical inputs to WGEEP during their study so as to make the WGEEP report more inclusive and thorough, chronicling every aspect of reality in the Western Ghats.

After almost a year and half since the panel was formed, the report was finally ready on August 2012. But mired in controversies and vociferously opposed by Industrial houses and well as state Governments, the report was released in the public domain after a long hiatus. After intense civil society pressure and public interest litigations, the WGEEP Report was finally released in May 2012 with a disclaimer by the MoEF saying that the contents of the report are not binding. A forty five day period was given to the general public to send in their opinions, recommendations and suggestions on the report, to the Ministry. The WGEEP Report has divided the entire Western Ghats into Ecological Sensitive Zones 1, 2 and 3 based on the critical studies undertaken throughout

the area and has delineated a set of rules to be followed for all developmental projects in the 3 areas. It also laid down a broader framework for the formation of the Western Ghats Ecological Authority.

The contentious aspects of the report which has earned it the ire of the Industry and State Governments, is that it has laid out an indefinite moratorium on new clearances to mining and no new establishment of red and orange category industries in ESZ 1 and 2. It has also suggested a gradual phasing away of existing mining in ESZ1 and 2 , by 2016. The report has also commented on the controversial Athirapally and Gundia Projects by saying that all dams and hydroelectric projects should not be allowed on rivers flowing through ESZ 1 and 2. The report also provided many restrictions on development in Ratnagiri & Sindhudurg districts of Maharashtra Western Ghats.

The Report has been vocally critiqued by the state governments of Kerala and Maharashtra and has been labeled as anti-development and anti-people. Keeping in mind the controversy surrounding the report, the government appointed another committee, called High level Working group for Western Ghats under Chairmanship of Dr.K. Kasturirangan, to go through the recommendations of WGEEP and response of various stakeholders received after the report. Amidst all these claims and counter-claims, the real importance and significance of the recommendations enlisted in the report have been lost in translation. The state governments have in many cases not translated the report into local languages and nor circulated it to people of Western Ghats. Many people are yet not aware of the true contents of the report and even if they are, they do not know the way in which they could voice their approval. Keeping in mind these multiple issues, we prepared this special session which could be a chance to discuss this highly political, controversial but crucially important issue.

Therefore a separate session aiming at bringing in all the stakeholders concerned with the policies regarding both development and conservation in the Western Ghats to debate the burning issues surrounding the report of this expert environmental panel. This bench had representations starting from the

government, NGO/NPOs, members of the panel, conservationists, activists, environmental journalists and members of the local communities.

Since, this report is highly technical and covers many dimensions, it is extremely important to present the findings in a more coherent and condensed manner. We summarized the WGEEP report into a 15 page document and enlisted all the salient points of the report. We had prepared both English and Marathi copies of the summary and they were handed over to the delegates on the very first day of the Conclave. This would have given them a lot of time to go through the document in detail and prepare their questions. On the second day of the Conclave, we also circulated a Marathi booklet which contained the summarized report. The session was to be conducted on the third day and everyone had an opportunity to prepare themselves beforehand for it.

The panel for the session consisted of Prof. Madhav Gadgil, the chairman of the WGEE Panel, Dr. Jay Samant, Director of Devraai, Kolhapur and Mr. Madhu Ramnath from Pallni Hills Development Council. The session was facilitated by eminent environmental lawyer Mr. Sanjay Upadhayay .

Mr. Upadhayay started the session by flagging off a few concerns which he wanted the panelists to shed more light on. Mr. Upadhayay questioned the need of categorization and asked if it proves detrimental beyond a certain point. He asked whether it is really possible to prohibit all sorts of development in sensitive areas. He also posed the question of identifying the real issues of state governments with the report and the role of the civil society in making the report more politically acceptable. He [posed ten very critical and well drafted questions to the panel and set the ball rolling for this sessions which had the highest attendance of the participants vent though that was the last day of the conclave.

Can WGEEP-WGEA save the Western Ghats?

Some Questions

- ⚡ Can we prohibit any developmental activity on such large scale while the laws on conservation including, WLP, FCA, EPA have been allowing them under the overall supervision of the Supreme Court with certain conditions. Such conditions not being monitored!
- ⚡ Are the categorisations ESZ1, ESZ2, ESZ3 scientifically validated?
- ⚡ Or they need a relook based on more empirical evidence and with the consultation of the Gram Sabha like in many other legislation where the Village assembly's views are mandatory?
- ⚡ How can we make the WGEEP more politically acceptable in the light of new developments such as NIB or CCI?
- ⚡ Why are the states' against the implementation of the WGEEP?
- ⚡ The Ministry feels that these are just recommendations and they need to be validated and discussed more before they are accepted.
- ⚡ Have we analysed the above dissents on merits?
- ⚡ Do you think a regional authority such as WGEA is feasible?
 - a. Does it erode state autonomy?
 - b. Does it conform to existing laws?
- ⚡ Are ESZ1 areas limited to PAs?
- ⚡ Are we over categorising our eco zones?
(National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves, Community Reserves, Critical Wildlife Habitat, Critical Tiger Habitat, Reserved Forest, Protected Forest, Ecologically sensitive Area, No Development Zone, Ecologically Fragile lands, Ecologically vulnerable areas, Elephant Reserves, Tiger Reserves)

Sanjay Upadhyay

Advocate, Supreme Court and contributor to Chapter on WGEA in WGEEP

Prof. Gadgil in his address took on most of the questions posed by Mr. Upadhyay. He said that the mad quest for economic growth is a colonial baggage that the country still carries. He further added that the constitution enshrines certain basic values which have to be upheld no matter what.

“Growth just for the sake of numbers is not needed, if it is pursued at the cost of deteriorating human values”.
Prof. Madhav Gadgil.

But there is a dichotomy wherein the growth policies of the state are eroding the very values which our constitution sets apart for its citizens. Economic growth should help further these values rather than corrode them. They should ideally bring more equality and better lives.

He pointed out that there is not one recommendation in the report that violates any constitutional right or value or goes outside the framework of accepted policies and programmes. He reiterated that the government is honor bound to implement the findings of the report. He said that the only thing that the report highlighted was the process of **‘Development by Exclusion and Imposition’** that the government of India is routinely projecting. The report also speaks of the consistent *‘Sabotage of Environment Policies’* and *‘Sabotage of Democratic Decision Making’* which is tantamount in this politics of exclusion. He further added that the common man is confused about his own decisions. If he opts for development, he will be under the mercy of mining giants or be displaced by large development projects. But, if he opts for conservation, he will be under the mercy of a tyrannical and colonial forest department. It seems like the common man is set to lose on both counts.

Prof. Gadgil repeated that the intention of the report primarily had been to take down decision making to the level of the Gram Sabhas (local self governing body of village) so that people can choose the lives they want for themselves. This was to help them decide on the kind of development they wanted. Even answering the question on over-categorization, he said that the categories were only recommendations which would ideally have been accepted or rejected at the village level. But the government ensured that, it would not go that far. They firstly did not release the report for the longest possible time and then did not even deem it necessary to translate and circulate the contents of the report. Prof. Gadgil cautioned the audience against a deliberate misleading campaign which was going on so as to

influence opinion against the panel. He said that the powerful state has been using its resources to erase the report from the public memory and the civil society needs to act fast to stop this from happening.

Mr. Madhu Ramnath spoke of the paradox in governance witnessed in India. On one hand there is rapid promotion of peoples institutions and more avenues for people to voice their politics. But at the same time power is being concentrated at the other pole. He said that these institutions effectively do not serve



any purpose as the power stays with those who own the resources. He talked of similar violations of environmental policies and forest laws in the Eastern Ghats of India and asked the people to make the report unfold in their own capacity. Waiting for political change of mind would make the situation irreversible.

“We have to teach the leaders of the Government, that the laws of Environment are the laws of survival. “

***Dr. Mohanlal Ghosh
West Bengal***

There were many discussions which followed on the floor of the house. Some people narrated their positive experiences working with the Forest department and spoke about how their work entails involving the forest department in issues of conservation. They said that one should not completely divorce their work from the forest department and instead try to build dialogue with them, which shall

make the work more sustainable. There were refutations to these stories by people who spoke of the arrogance and the indifference of the Forest department. People stressed on the idea of practical instruments supporting policy instruments. They said that unless a policy can be implemented on the ground feasibly, there is no point if it looks excellent on paper.

Some of the delegates said that the Kasturirangan committee should be used as an opportunity to air consent in favor of the Gadgil committee report. If opinions are sent to the Kasturirangan committee, then they shall certainly find mention and in fact make the case for implementing the recommendations even stronger. People narrated the stories of how the



government is on a propaganda mission to malign the report in their respective areas by giving misleading information. They said that people are getting brain washed and are gradually coming to believe that the report does not support better lives for them. They urged all gathered delegates to try to market the report

in their fields and do so with speed and accuracy. If each delegate tries to spread some awareness about the report at the Gram sabha level and helps translating the summary into a local language, then the correct information can be easily disseminated. There were suggestions to involve the students enrolled in National Service Scheme (NSS) to help spread awareness about the report.

A few delegates raised practical questions about providing the people more information about alternate forms of livelihood generation and giving them the chance to choose. If we only speak of conservation, then it does not serve the purpose. Rather we should enable them to see why sustainable development is a better future choice. There were many village representatives wanted to discuss and hear from Prof. Gadgil about the misinterpretation and restrictions posed by district level administration posed on people in the name of WGEEP report. Eg Removal of laterite from the small quarries for house building in Konkan area of Maharashtra.

The session carried on well beyond its designated time and yet the discussions continued. Since, we had to start with our next session; we organized a small parallel session with Prof. Gadgil. The interested members could carry on their conversation with him and pose questions. Prof. Gadgil willingly took up the

parallel session where discussions, suggestions and strategies were discussed for almost an hour.

At the end of the session, people had gathered a wholesome perspective of the WGEEP report and its significance for the Western Ghats. There were many people who intended to take it up to the Gram Sabha level in order to spread more awareness about it. But we know that even as the government continues to keep the recommendations in the dark, civil society organizations have taken the charge to see that the government wakes up and answers their questions.

3.2 Green Economy and Institutional Frameworks

The UNEP has defined Green Economy simply as an economic system that results in, **‘improved human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities’**. A green economy would be one which that optimizes the use of natural resources, is focused on social equity and inclusion and which cuts down on carbon emissions. Such an economic system would actively promote biodiversity conservation; create ‘green jobs’ which are centered on recognizing and fulfilling environmental responsibilities and delivering just environmental services.

Not many people are aware of the way Green jobs are created and the way in



which corporate try to fulfill their environmental responsibility. While we critique corporate for not taking peoples issues in mind and pursuing growth without looking at the consequences. But it is also important for us to understand the views of the corporate and try to see their logic of fulfilling their

environmental responsibilities without sacrificing on economic returns. This

session was extremely crucial to give the members from corporate groups, a foothold in the discourse of conservation and sustainable development. The session was chaired by Mr. Jayant Sarnaik, Deputy Director, AERF, Pune. Mrs. Parimal Chaudhary, the Founder-Director of the Praj foundation represented the corporate sector in this session. Praj Foundation is one of the leading manufacturers of Ethanol in this area. She was joined by Mr. Milind Ratnaparkhi, of Saurwin Technologies Inc. a US based entrepreneur, and Mr. Pratim Roy, Director, Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri.

Mr. Jayant Sarnaik flagged off the session by highlighting that practitioners' should identify the shortcomings of policies and focus on more practical collaborations. He said that it is not entirely possible for us to say that no resources should be touched and the economic needs of the people should be ignored.

Mrs. Chaudhary of Praj Foundation has been pursuing environmental conservation as one of the agenda of CSR of Praj Industries since last five years. She talked about the eco friendly practices that her organization has been following. They use barren lands, grasslands and waste lands for furl plants instead of using forest land. She highlighted the fact that corporate houses need to work in collaboration with NGOs in order to get proper guidance about the green activities they could invest their resources in. Praj Foundation works with AERF and has invested to save 50 acres of private forest land. Apart from that they subscribe to green garbage and work on creating awareness amongst a captive audience about minimizing all sorts of energy wastage. She admitted that it may not be a huge change, but the willingness to be a part of protecting the environment is present in most corporate. It needs more dialogue between stakeholders and a receptive attitude, to cash in on this new found willingness.

Mr. Pratim Roy talked of another aspect of green jobs which pertains to development of entrepreneurial skill at the grassroots level. He talked of his flagship venture, The Last Enterprise. Attracted by the prospect of working with Adivasis and questions of their livelihood, they started marketing locally produced honey in Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu. It was an attempt to reverse the

pathetic livelihood situations where the tribals were paid a pittance for their products. In the years since 1994, the enterprise markets a range of locally produced food items and also works in collaboration with other NGOs who believe in the same principles of fair trade. More than 8000 people have been engaged in this enterprise and the profits pay the salaries of nearly 30 employees. The organization makes a turnover of nearly 1.5 crores.

Mr. Milind Ratnaparkhi spoke about the optimal use of alternative technologies and people friendly delivery mechanisms. He talked of the need to sensitize people to new forms of non-conventional energy which can be used as more resource efficient means. He also pointed out that there are possibilities to develop hybrid small scale energy production systems at village level and thereby reduce the dependency of Govt. provided power plants and disastrous projects like large hydropower and thermal power projects. He urged the delegates to minimize energy wastage in their own individual capacities.

Mr. Jayant Sarnaik wound up the session by saying that, we should look at sustainable consumption as an alternate because only then energy can be conserved. In the Western Ghats we are mostly concerned about biodiversity conservation but it is also important to think that how industrial growth should not be impeded or have a negative impact on such development. Therefore, green economy is a critical issue to be followed up. He also brought it to the notice of the audience that green economy does not necessarily mean energy issues and environment, but there is a huge scope to engage the corporate operating in the Western Ghats in the biodiversity related issues and to develop mechanisms to help businesses to shoulder the responsibility of conservation. He also pointed out that global corporate operating in the Western Ghats region are looking forward to participate in such solutions. Finally he reiterated that there is a need to establish rapport and continuous dialogue with corporate and businesses from the region and there should be cohesive operative environment.

After three days of intense discussions, deliberations and sharing of ideas all the participants went back with lot of new visions, understanding and a hope

to make difference for Western Ghats. Before everyone departed from Mahabaleshwar the organizers profusely thanked them for participation. Support of donors has been explained to all and duly acknowledged.



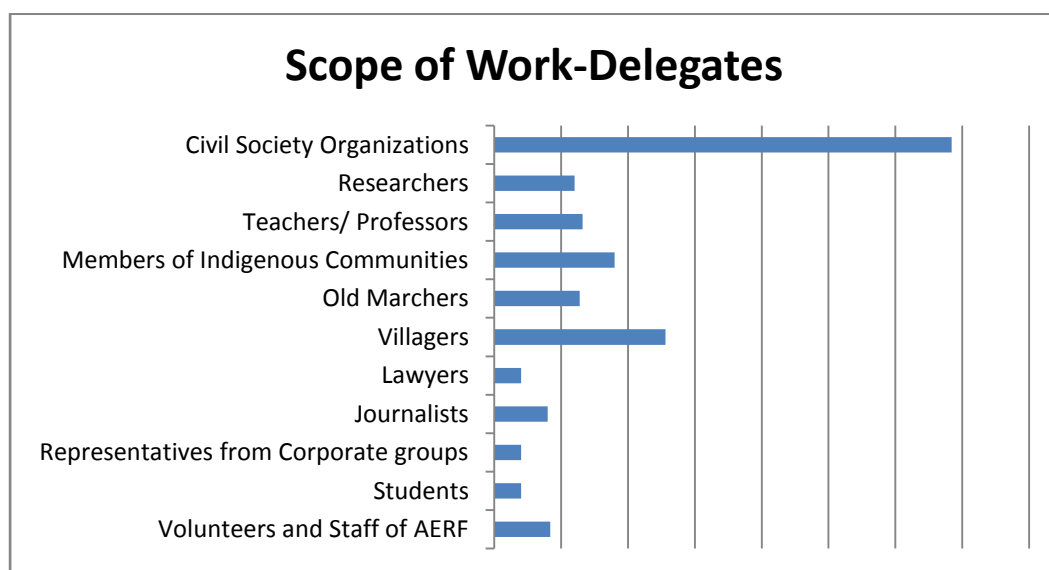
4.What we achieved

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, there were three primary commitments which we had envisaged. We intended the Conclave to be a stock-taking exercise which will present before us the changes in environmental advocacy since the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88 and wished to provide both a space and an opportunity for further churning of ideas to take place. We had also wanted this to be a networking exercise where practitioners from the different parts of the Western Ghats could collectively deliberate on the issues, solutions and commitments for the future. Finally, we wanted this to be a chance for long term and sustainable partnerships to be built which would go beyond just deliberations and translate into practice. Thus, the wider impacts of this Conclave would certainly take a little longer and in its best form will be reflected in the field through conservation efforts. But, the process has begun with the conclave and we intend to highlight the major outcomes in this section. The conclave has been appreciated by many participants and media about its informal nature, openness, collective wisdom and teamwork for its smooth implementation.

4.1 *Networking Impact*

- Through our outreach efforts which began since the month of June, we contacted nearly 1000 organizations and individuals. Through emails, phone calls and postal letters we sent out invites and talked about the purpose and goals of the conclave. We also sent out all our background papers, brochures and three monthly newsletters to all the people we contacted. Even though around 345 people turned up for the Conclave, we were associated with many others who were unable to attend it. There was correspondence shared and the awareness about the Meet and its agenda was disseminated to a wider population. Many people have expressed interest to participate in the future annual meetings and be a part of the bigger deliberations on the future of the Western Ghats. This Conclave has helped us to form a wide database of practitioners, researchers, activists and students which would help forming strong partnerships in the future.

- The conclave saw a total of 345 delegates take part in it. We got participants working on various cross cutting Environmental issues. There were representatives from various big and small NGOs, independent researchers, activists, professors, teachers, lawyers, artists, writers, journalists, representatives from corporate groups, government officials, members of Indigenous communities, villagers from Western Ghats and students. This cross-section of participants helped make the Conclave more holistic as we got the opportunity to interact with people from various walks of life with diverse opinions, experiences and solutions. There were sessions where each participant could contribute in her own unique way and this diversity helped enrich the discussions.
- The delegates gathered in the conclave worked on a range of issues. Through our networking efforts, we tried to get participants working on various conservation issues in the Western Ghats. Some of the areas of work are forest management, tribal rights, water conservation, urban research, waste management, solar energy research, eco-tourism, livelihood generation, legal activism, food sovereignty, rural development, environment education, sanitation, drinking water, herpetology, ethno-biology, eco-logical planning and restoration, environment film-making, ecological planning, forest restoration, wildlife conservation etc.

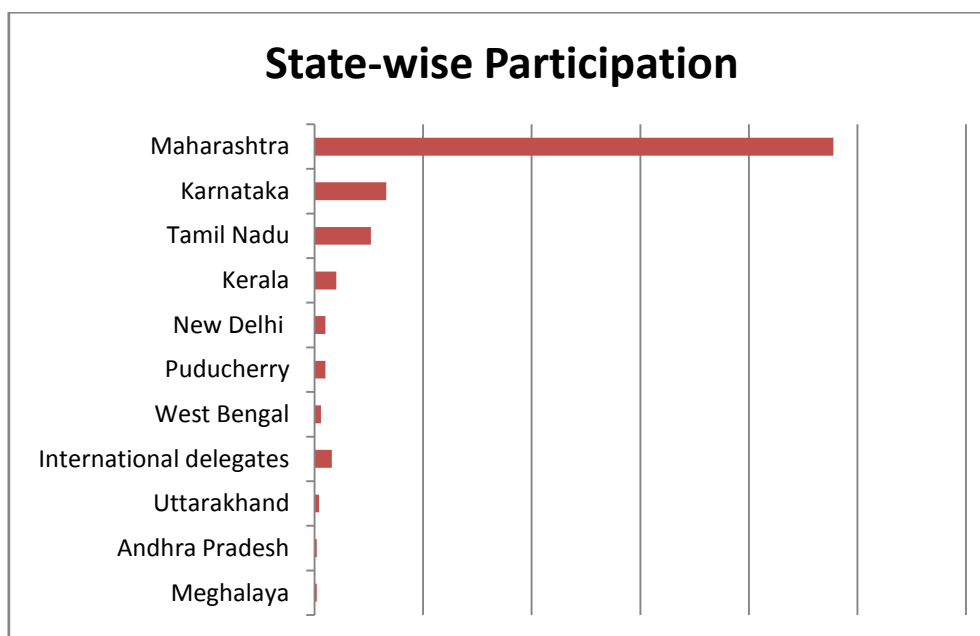


- We received participation from the Western Ghats states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Gujarat. The only state we did not have any participation from was Goa. Even though there were no participants from Goa during the 3 days, we had received the active assistance of many old marchers from Goa during the preparation of the Conclave and have documented their experiences in the book, ***'Stories of Struggles-Environmental Movements in the Western Ghats.*** We even had participants from West Bengal, New Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Puducherry. There were 8 international delegates present during the Conclave who participated in all the proceedings for all 3 days.

The Western Ghats being so vast, houses a diversity of people and cultures. The issues concerning the people and the environment are not the same throughout the Western Ghats. The Northern Western Ghats and the southern Western Ghats face different problems pertaining to skewed development, conservation efforts and livelihood issues. Usually efforts by individuals and organizations tend to get localized which might distance them from getting the larger picture of concerns in the Western Ghats. In such situations, there is the scope to be unaware of indifferent to problems and solutions happening elsewhere in the Western Ghats. The conclave with so many people from different states gave an opportunity to people to put across region wise differences in issues and efforts on the same platform and initiate a discussion about the larger picture.

The perspectives of delegates working in the non-Western Ghats states also gave a fresh perspective to the any questions that were raised. The international delegates also became aware of the unique ecological and cultural heritage of the Western Ghats and the threats to its people and its ecosystem. In all, the quality of networking was enriched through this wide and rich diversity of delegates who had gathered. There were a lot of discussions and presentations on conservation efforts, on the ground solutions implemented in different villages and cities across the Western

Ghats and many notes were exchanged. Apart from the collective expression of solidarity by so many people, this networking proved to be more productive by offering the examples of many best practices followed across the country to facilitate conservation efforts.



- Through our networking efforts, we managed to rope in members from 6 Indigenous communities to participate in the Indigenous day celebrations and especially market their local food and cultural artifacts at the Food Festival. It was a unique platform for the members of these Indigenous communities to showcase their local food items and help get an opportunity to market them to a larger audience. Usually members of tribal communities are not a direct part of such civil society Conclaves. Their participation in this event will help all the delegates, network with them in the future and provide them with more entry points towards voicing their concerns on conservation, development and agro-biodiversity on a larger platform. There can be a lot of interventions in the field using these members of Indigenous communities as they are most acquainted with the local ecology of their habitats.
- The time of the conclave was a crucial period in the activism surrounding the Western Ghats as it also marked 25 years since the Save the Western Ghats march 1987/88. It was an opportunity to trace back many of the

old marchers who since 25 years have continued in their quest to deliver environmental justice for the people of the Western Ghats. We hosted 34 old marchers at the Conclave from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Apart from the participating marchers, we corresponded with and renewed contacts with many other marchers who helped us to furnish our archives and shared with us their experiences and views about the Save the Western Ghats March. The Conclave provided an opportunity for the present generation of environmentalists in the Western Ghats to network with these veterans and look forward to collaborating in the future.

4.2 Social Impact

- In the course of 3 days, there were a number of sessions focusing on a variety of issues which affect the ecological integrity of the Western Ghats. Nearly 350 people were sensitized over the course of 3 days, about the way in which individual and collective efforts can be channelized to create long term results in the field. True to the idea of being practitioners', the Conclave aimed at disseminating more information about multiple problems and the many ways in tackling and going around these roadblocks to aid conservation efforts in the Western Ghats. The learning, suggestions, opinions and comments will be carried forward by these participating delegates and hopefully will reach out to an even wider audience throughout the Western Ghats.
- One of the crucial impacts of the conclave was renewing the contacts with various old marchers who were a crucial part of the SWG March. Though the movement has been revived since 2009, this Conclave marked the true revival of the movement, by bringing into its fold, the veterans. The presence of these marchers amidst us, made the Conclave in effect a huge stock taking effort where the successes, failures and solutions since the past 25 years were assessed. The marchers spoke in the session 'Down Memory Lane' and interacted with the assembled delegates for all 3 days. While they spoke about their experiences from 25 years ago, they also talked about the changes which they are noticing

in the ways activism plays out. Their opinions and suggestions found resonance with the audience and everybody benefitted from their enthusiasm and wisdom.

- The political environment in the Western Ghats is surcharged with a lot of discussion pertaining to the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Report and its findings. Many state governments have opposed the findings of the committee and have even labeled it as anti-development. But, with all the claims and counter-claims, there are still a large number of people who are not completely aware of the full contents of the report and how the findings are crucial for the conservation the Western Ghats ecology. There was a dedicated panel discussion on the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel report and the chairman of the WGEEP, Prof. Madhav Gadgil, was the chief panelist. He was present at the Conclave for 2 days and interacted with all the delegates. The highly interactive and informative session shed a lot of light on the Report, its true recommendations, political road blocks and its ramifications for the future of the Western Ghats. There were many suggestions fielded about taking the recommendations to the people in Western Ghats after summarizing and translating the reports into the local languages. The summarized report booklet in Marathi and the summarized report in English was circulated amongst the gathered audience. Many of the delegates took up extra copies of the report to be circulated in their localities. It was a huge awareness generation initiative, which will help the report get a lot more visibility.
- This was also the year when the Western Ghats made it to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and was repeatedly featured in the Media. The ability to make use of this media visibility and keep up the momentum would be an important step for all environmentalists. Mr. V.B Mathur conducted a session on the importance of this tag and the long and arduous process which led to it. But, most importantly he also spoke of the way this could be extrapolated on the field. Therein, is the real importance of the Western Ghats being a world heritage site. Otherwise it would just continue to be mere tokenism.

- This was the first time that an entire day was dedicated to the concerns of the Indigenous Communities of the Western Ghats. Though their concerns are usually given place at such conferences, this time they directly interacted with other stakeholders for 3 days. It was also the first time that the links of Agro-biodiversity were traced to reclaiming local food cultures and a Food festival was conducted at the MTDC Complex. While it was a first for many Indigenous community members to showcase their local produce, the audience got a chance to experience the richness and diversity of the food presentations. The tribal members opened up to participating in more of such Food festivals and talking more about local forms of resource production, procurement and consumption. They also could network with organizations like Slow Food, Indigenous Partnership for Agro-biodiversity and local Food sovereignty and successful food festival organizers from the North East to gain more knowledge about the way they could use this medium to promote local food security.
- The Food Festival was an immense success. The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation expressed their interest in hosting another such Food Festival showcasing the culinary delights of the people from Northern Western Ghats. This showed that the idea had the potential of being funded and marketed by government organizations and could in the short run benefit members of Indigenous Communities.
- Environmental litigations and legal advocacy is widely becoming a popular forum to demand environmental justice. And a rather potent forum at that. We had a substantial presence of lawyers and legal activists at the conclave who spoke about the way in which Public Interest Litigations (PILs) can be successfully used to question faulty laws and policies and take both the government and private environmental offenders to task. This session helped people get an idea about the situations in which PILs can be most effective, the process to start a legal campaign and the other ancillary measures which can further strengthen this kind of legal interventions. This knowledge is extremely crucial for

the many small civil society organizations and activists who are not adequately informed about the various recourses they could take up after flagging a problem. It proved to be a vital session for all gathered as it gave them hands on information about the way a practitioner could approach the law for help.

- There was adequate opportunity given the members of civil society organizations, researchers and students to both speak about their work and flag their issues and problems. There were 2 sessions of Environment Dialogues on the first and the second day of the conclave as well as a small session focusing on the work being done in Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani, where the conclave was conducted. These sessions saw presentations and discussions initiated by nearly 10 different organizations on a range of issues. These members showcased their work in the ground to aid conservation efforts and provide sustainable livelihoods to the people. Their practical solutions, ingenious innovations and motivated perusal of environmental justice proved to be an inspiration for all gathered there. Many could learn from their approaches and talked about using some of their ideas in their won field. Dr. Jared Buono from Watershed Management Group, Mahabaleshwar talked of the use of ingeniously crafted spring boxes to conserve spring water in the area. His work caught the attention of some journalists and they intend to publicize his work even further. Arun Bellie from Kotagiri talked of his determined efforts to involve children in waste management and Oikos, Pune presented their work on restoring forest land. All these presentations found favor with the audience and worked as a source of information and paved a way ahead for future commitments.
- Many organizations and students had put up their posters and photographs for all 3 days which talked about their work. These posters were accessible to the audience at all times during the entire Conclave and generated many deliberations on the work and profiles of these organizations. It not only publicized their work but helped them find common ground with other people and organizations whose interests

and work areas tallied with theirs. There were many questions answered and doubts resolved through such informal interactions and served the purpose of informative and educational networking. Some organizations also distributed their newsletters, pamphlets and brochures during the conclave.

- The conclave saw significant participation from members of industrial and corporate houses. It was declared from the very beginning that the conclave aims at being stakeholders meet where we would invite people from all walks of life to deliberate about the future of the Western Ghats. More than often, understanding the conflict of development as an 'Us versus Them' debate or an 'Activist versus Corporate' debate can prove to be very problematic. It is important for us to also engage in discussions with the corporate houses and help them work out a sustainable strategy through which they could fulfill their environmental responsibilities. The animosity just creates a cliché of believers, where the ideas and opinions crystallize and then lie dormant. The need of the hour is to be more fluid in our engagements and involve the people who we believe are against our environmental ideals and help them understand our perspective. At the same time, it is also crucial for us to empathize with the situation of the corporate house and try drawing up a more sustainable path which would result in the emancipation of the local communities.

The corporate assembled at the conclave actively took part in all these discussions and showed their resolve in creating more green jobs and fulfilling their environmental responsibilities. They understood that they were treated as stakeholders in this forum and not as antagonists whose views were to be shrugged off. This gave a more holistic understanding to many questions of development and helped create a much needed network with the corporate entities. This network is becoming more and more indispensable with time and this conclave sensitized people as to how they should optimally and justly make use of such relations for the larger good of the Western Ghats.

- There were a number of books on sale during the three days of the conclave which pertained to conservation efforts in the Western Ghats. The 2 books released during the conclave included 'Paschim Ghat bachao Mohim' by Jagdish Godbole and 'Stories of Struggles: Environmental Movements in the Western Ghats' by Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF). Apart from that, there were many editions of Sakav, a Marathi magazine published by AERF which brought together the contributions of various practitioners' from Northern Western Ghats. These books were purchased by a large number of delegates and can prove to be a permanent form of archiving knowledge and aiding its dissemination.

4.3 Media/Communication Impact

- The 3 day conclave was covered by nearly 20 media houses (print and electronic) which gave it the much needed visibility and exposure. The detailed news items highlighted the agenda; the issues and the solutions discussed at the conclave and managed to draw the attention of the public. This media attention and individual follow up by various journalists is a huge impact as it can take the cause of the Western Ghats into the living rooms of people and force them to take cognizance of the ecological injustice that is happening. This kind of media attention will help people question the paradox of Development and get more political about issues of the environment. Without the interest and support of the journalists, the outcomes of the conclave would have been limited to a clichéd audience only and would have never reached the larger population.
- The pre-publicity of the conclave was done through detailed reports in the Times of India (Pune and Goa edition), Indian Express and Sakal Times. We had also sent out invites and publicized the event in all the universities and autonomous colleges of Maharashtra. The event was also publicized through the India Water Portal, Conservation India website, Tribal Heritage website etc. This gave leverage to the visibility

of the event and the issues it speaks about. We created a dedicated website, www.savethewesternghats.org for the conclave in the month of June, 2012. This website and updates before , during and after the conclave have been very useful and appreciated.

- We used social media to our fullest capacity to create opinion on the cause of the Western Ghats online. There is a dedicated face book page and a twitter handle for the Save the Western Ghats conclave with a large number of active followers. There continues to be a number of pertinent discussions online which we try to flag or moderate. In all it has managed to create some space in the social media circle and draw the attention of people towards significant questions concerning this region.
- The event was covered by journalists from Times of India⁴, Sakal, Loksatta, Divya Marathi, Agro One, Tarun Bharat and Maharashtra Times. These were reports in the print media. The electronic media was represented by IBN Lokmat, Zee 24 Taas, DD News and ABP Mazha. These news channels and newspapers have immense popularity in Maharashtra and getting print and screen space was a much needed boost. It was motivational for people who strive to draw more attention to their work in the Western Ghats and an eye-opener for the general public.
- Apart from Maharashtra, the conclave found mention in Matrubhumi, the leading Malayalam daily from Kerala, the Hindu, Kanyakumari edition⁵, Tamil Nadu and in the Indian Institute of Human Settlements website⁶. This helped disseminate the agenda even further and generate larger interest in civil society activism and conservation efforts on the ground.

⁴<http://mobilepaper.timesofindia.com/mobile.aspx?article=yes&pageid=11§id=edid=&edlabel=TOIPU&mydateHid=08-12-2012&pubname=Times+of+India+-+Pune&edname=&articleid=Ar01101&publabel=TOI>

⁵<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/a-taste-of-rich-food-culture/article4177390.ece?css=print>

⁶<http://www.iihs.co.in/events/conferences/western-ghats-and-the-urban/>

- Individual reports on the food festival were published in Marathi newspapers Sakal Times and Loksatta on 2nd December 2012. This drew attention to this vibrant form of promoting local food cultures and working towards local food security.

What we have missed

Though we have tried our best to incorporate all the suggestions since the inception of this idea of celebrating 25 years of Save the Western Ghats March and working towards rejuvenating civil society, we have missed on certain plans and could not provide enough time on certain issues during the conclave. While reporting the conclave it is also a good idea to look back and see what we have missed.

- In spite of our persistent efforts to rope in members from the local administration and government officials, we could not get a proper response from them. We had invited all the district collectors of the Western Ghats districts and the Principal Chief Conservators of Forests of all the 6 Western Ghats states, but not a single person attended the Conclave. This just goes on to show that we as members of the civil society have to put in a lot more effort to get the attention of our administrators and politicians and try to continuously engage in dialogue so as to help them understand our perspective. We realized that there is fear factor about NGOs and civil societies among the govt. and corporate sector as image of civil society is that of activists opposing all development. Therefore government and Businesses prefer to keep safe distance from civil society. The recent ripples of WGEEP report further kept govt. representatives away from the conclave, some attended but silently without being on the fore front.
- There were many members of corporate groups and people working in the private sector involved in the conclave. Though there were many informal discussions, these members were still warming up to the idea of conservation and development being spoken of in the same platform and were not as active as we had expected them to be. Nevertheless, it

was a beginning of forging new relationships and these participants go back, much more aware of their environmental responsibilities and duties. We are hoping for more fruitful associations with the corporate sector in the future.

- People had assembled for the conclave from all the states of the Western Ghats. Though there were routine translations in both English and Marathi, language at most times proved to be a bone of contention. There was some loss in translation and there would be an effort to engage translators in all Western Ghats languages in the future for the Conclave to be more accessible and comprehensive for all gathered.
- There was always a lack of enough time to speak about their work. Even after making every possible arrangement for all interested participants to address the gathering, there were still a few people who did not get a chance to speak. We draw the insight that we could form smaller interest groups or action groups in the future to facilitate smoother discussions and opinion sharing.
- One of the highlights of the conclave was that, it was arranged in an absolutely natural setting, amidst trees and greenery. But we had to compensate for such a setting with some organizational hazards like putting up screens and setting up food stalls. The area was home to a group of monkeys who proved to be quite a handful for the organizers.
- We had publicized that there would be a session dedicated to Environmental Education: Formal and Non-formal and a session focusing on the use of literature as a means of conservation titled 'A Literary Take'. Due to last minute cancellations by the speakers, we could not conduct these sessions. There were some participants who had expressed their interest in these sessions and in order to compensate for the inconvenience, we gave them adequate time to speak about their concerns and project their work in front of the audience.
- In spite of a lot of time and energy being spent on networking with the youth from various universities, we could not gather a strong youth

presence for the conclave. The few students who did participate were extremely enthusiastic, spoke about their work and interacted with the gathered guests. But we were largely unsuccessful in roping in more enthusiastic student participation from various schools and colleges. This shows that there is a disconnect between the way we project environmental concerns and the way it is received by the youth. It may either indicate a dwindling interest in environmental issues among students or may speak of the need to think and act differently while reaching out to them. This is an issue on which we will certainly introspect and work on as the movement needs a spirited, youth based rejuvenation.

Section V The Road Ahead



The Road Ahead

Since the Save the western Ghats March of 1987-88, a historical event and one of the noteworthy environmental movements in India, the environmental degradation in Western Ghats hotspot is ever increasing. The process of globalization and demands of industries, have accelerated the degradation further since 1991. Such development started putting enormous pressure on the natural resources like land, water and forests at the same time started pushing the local communities to corner and brought unforeseen changes to their livelihoods and agriculture. The serene environment and free ecosystem services available to these communities were snatched by the globalization and multinationals at meager costs. The environmental decision making and engagement of local stakeholders reduced and become a formality. Civil society organizations were responding to these changes in their own arena of influence and have been opposing the destructive development wherever necessary and possible. Some civil society groups have been trying to provide workable doable solutions to address the issue of environmental degradation in Western Ghats. Conservation research institutions have developed better understanding of dwindling species and their populations, enhanced understanding of various ecosystems and impacts of changes within them again with an objective of conservation. Government both at state and central level had been trying to fine tune the management of protected areas within the Western Ghats, and to develop new ways of engaging local communities in the process of conservation. Department of Forest at state level and Ministry of Environment & Forests at Centre played a pivotal role in formulating new legislations to protect environment, forests and reducing pollution, all in good faith but energy to implement such ideas had been lacking seriously. There had been always a dilemma within the govt. to promote protection and sustainable development vs. faster development at the cost of forests and biodiversity. However bringing all these issues and understanding together for developing a long term workable solutions has been a challenge.

The Mahabaleshwar conclave organized by AERF and Save the Western Ghats group tried to address the challenge and we are sure that these three days of intense discussions, deliberations, sharing and enjoyment, it helped participants to rejuvenate, to learn and to work with more enthusiasm and vigor than before , the conclave created new collaborations , partnerships, friendships and showed rays of hope.

The conclave certainly helped establishing a strong network of civil society organizations that will work together, share their concerns and act in collaborations and will work closely with Government, businesses and policy makers for long term sustainability of conservation initiatives in Western Ghats landscape.



There were many challenges thrown up during this conclave which should lead to a lot of introspection and reflection. While the idea of an annual meeting is appealing and is most likely to be conducted next year, there is also the need to form smaller action groups to work on specific issues. There could be smaller issue wise meetings on specific aspects of skewed development like mining, hydro-electric projects, logging, media based advocacy, legal activism, human-animal conflict, water conservation, eco-tourism etc. These smaller issue based meetings could be more technical and directly pertaining to interventions in the field. This would prove to be the best way in which networks could be put to use for tangible results.

Apart from this there should be regular interactions and communication about the work done by various organizations, so that they are regularly updated about the work going on in various parts of the Western Ghats. There should be regular newsletters circulated and visual or printed material distributed keeping everyone abreast of the changes. Special attention should be given to

the grassroots organizations who do a lot of quality work but are unable to communicate or document it thoroughly.

There should be more effective use of the media to pitch and project issues. It is the biggest tool in the hands of the practitioners' and instead of being skeptical about it, they should use it to their best capacity in order to give their problems and potentials more leverage.

There has to be a serious rethinking about ways in which the youth can be integrated into the fold of the movement. The movement can be nourished only when new, agile and fresh minds contribute with their passion and skill and this needs a lot more awareness generation.

There has to be more concerted efforts to interact with the youth and make them feel passionately about the cause of the Environment. They should be allowed to freely voice their opinions, critique and question the movement



because that may be the beginning of better ideas and strategies. Another group which needs to be focused on is the administration which was also conspicuous with its absence in the Conclave. It is important for us to understand that the best reforms would need the

support of the state. Therefore instead of merely lampooning the state for all mishaps, it is imperative for us to facilitate dialogue with the administration in our own individual capacities. Once these efforts bear fruit, we can hope towards a more enriching collective deliberation with them. The same goes for the members of the corporate houses and representatives from the private sector. We should make the environment conducive for more spirited engagement rather than mere mud-slinging.

All this points to the need to rethink the way environmental activism has played out in the Western Ghats. This is the time to move away from just criticisms and work towards solutions. Instead of making it a fight between 'them' and 'us', it is the time to make the two opposites meet and figure out the way to break the ideological impasse. Of course violations of the environment and deprivation of the people should be critiqued and protested in the strongest words. But, at the same time, there is a need to work towards ensuring that peoples' livelihoods and their ambitions are not impaired in any way. A democratic system of feedback collection and decision making has to be put in place which would empower the people at the grassroots.



There is also the need to reanalyze the potential of the Save the Western Ghats Group at this point. Though the group brings together people from different geographical locations, working on different issues and from different age groups, there is a need to expand its

scope to make it include more people with new ideas. This shall not only make the group more inclusive but shall bring in fresh ideas and opinions which will only strengthen the movement.

The near future shall certainly see all these questions being discussed and hopefully, new intervention ideas emerging from it. In the course of a few months, we shall see how the new networks play out and how they affect results on the field. But, we can clearly say that at this point, after the successful completion of the Conclave, the movement has been revitalized by the joining of so many new members and the arrival of so many fresh ideas. The knowledge and wisdom of these new members shall only go on to rejuvenate civil society and the movement and make it more potent for the future.

Challenges Ahead

1. How to engage youth and to rethink their engagement in early stages of their careers
2. How to engage meaning fully with businesses beyond expectations of financial support
3. What are common set of simple doable objective for civil society to work together.
4. How to institutionalize the groups and tackle the leadership issues along with respecting individual identities and egos.
5. How to communicate effectively with various stakeholders group and work towards synergy.

The Save the Western Ghats Conclave 2012 has shown us that the road ahead is arduous and difficult. There is the probability that it is lined with skewed development, social indifference and political apathy towards the cause of the Western Ghats. But it has also taught us that, expecting all these road blocks, we have to strategize and use the resources at our disposal to effectively navigate around these issues. While there was a lot of motivation provided by the old marchers, there was renewed vigor in the assembled delegates on hearing personal success stories and practical strategies of conservation. While some old ties were rediscovered, this was an opportunity to make new friends and give shape to new ambitions.

There were a variety of issues discussed in the course of 3 days which ranged from understanding urban development in the Western Ghats to the role of

the media in awareness generation and advocacy. People took in from the examples of other mountain networks in India and gave ideas and suggestions about civil society networking in the Western Ghats. They heard the issues of the Indigenous communities not through an outsider but through their own narrations and understood why reclaiming their food cultures are linked to

Some Answers

- ✓ **Institutionalize Save the Western Ghats group in a formal way.**
- ✓ **Regular meetings of interest groups and or issue based groups.**
- ✓ **Continue to organize annual meeting to share and learn.**
- ✓ **Create an advisory group to develop doable action plans.**
- ✓ **Create a group and or institution with members of all the stakeholders groups including media and businesses.**

their political autonomy. While they enjoyed the food dished up by the members of these communities, there were reflections on how potent this idea is for local food security and protecting agro-biodiversity.

Emotions flared up when discussions took place on the political apathy towards the WGEEP report and many suggestions were fielded to take up the issue to the Gram Sabhas. Many, for the first time understood the full dimensions of the report and took up the onus on them to circulate its true essence among the people. People spoke of their own work through presentations, exhibits, posters, photographs and answered questions posed by curious listeners. They were sensitized to issues of alternative technology, green Jobs and Corporate Environmental Responsibility. The three days were charged with an atmosphere of curiosity, where the zeal to learn, inform, work harder and make a difference was seen in every assembled delegate. Over tea time discussions and long walks, with exchanging cards and phone numbers, with meeting long lost friends and opening up your mind to new ideas, each person was charged with the ambition of seeing a better, greener and more just tomorrow.

There was enthusiasm in the air, there was the passion of making a difference, whatever be the cost.

There was the willingness and the courage to keep voicing the concerns of the Western Ghats.

And in the end, it is probably what we shall remember at the end of it all.

Because in the end, it is all that actually matters.

Annexure 1
List of Organizations

Sr. No	Name of Organization	City/Town/Village	State
1	Achievers	Chinsurah	West Bengal
2	Applied Environmental Research Foundation	Pune	Maharashtra
3	Aranya	Puducherry	Puducherry
4	ARDE (Jividha)	Pune	Maharashtra
5	Asoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment	Bengaluru	Karnataka
6	Biome Conservation Foundation	Pune	Maharashtra
7	Bird Song	Sangli	Maharashtra
8	Bombay Environmental Action Group	Mumbai	Maharashtra
9	Bombay Natural History Society	Mumbai	Maharashtra
10	BVS Nature Club	Sangli	Maharashtra
11	Central Himalayan Environment Association	Nainital	Uttarakhand
12	Centre for Environmental Education	Pune	Maharashtra
13	Ch. Shivaji College	Satara	Maharashtra
14	Creative Nature Friends	Karad	Maharashtra
15	Dainik Bhaskar Group	Aurangabad	Maharashtra
16	Department of Environmental Science, Shivaji University	Kolhapur	Maharashtra
17	Devraai	Kolhapur	Maharashtra
18	Dolphin Nature Group	Satara	Maharashtra
19	Earth Care	Pune	Maharashtra
20	Enviro-legal Forum	Kolhapur	Maharashtra
21	Equations	Bengaluru	Karnataka
22	GAIA	Thrissur	Kerala
23	Gandhi Peace Foundation	New Delhi	New Delhi
24	Gogate-Joglekar College	Ratnagiri	Maharashtra
25	Grameen aur Paryavaran Kendra	Panchgani	Maharashtra
26	Hooghly Mohsin College	Hooghly	West Bengal
27	Hope	Thane	Maharashtra
28	India Water Portal, Arghyam	Trivandrum	Kerala
29	Indian Institute of Human Settlements	Bengaluru	Karnataka
30	Indigenous Partnerships for Agro-biodiversity and Food sovereignty	Rome	Italy
31	Jagruti Vikas Mandal	Bhandara	Maharashtra
32	JNTU	Hyderabad	Andhra Pradesh
33	Kamala College	Kolhapur	Maharashtra
34	KBNS Mandir	Chandanagore	West Bengal
35	Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad	Cochin	Kerala

36	Keystone Foundation	Kotagiri	Tamilnadu
37	Khandesh Nature Conservation Society	Jalgaon	Maharashtra
38	Maharashtra Raksha Mitra Sangathan	Jalgaon	Maharashtra
39	Malnad Wildlife Group	Shimoga	Karnataka
40	Manuvikasa	Siddapur	Karnataka
41	Nature Foundation	Sangli	Maharashtra
42	Navya Disha	Belgaum	Karnataka
43	Nisarg Pratishthan	Sangli	Maharashtra
44	Nivedita Pratishthan	Dapoli	Maharashtra
45	Observer Research Foundation	Mumbai	Maharashtra
46	Oikos	Pune	Maharashtra
47	OSAI	Coimbatore	Tamilnadu
48	P.S Kadam College	Satara	Maharashtra
49	Paryavaran Pratham	Nagpur	Maharashtra
50	Paryavaran Vikas Sangha	Maval	Maharashtra
51	Paryavarani	Belgaum	Karnataka
52	Raanwata	Satara	Maharashtra
53	Radiant Energy Systems Pvt. Ltd.	Pune	Maharashtra
54	Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu College	Kolhapur	Maharashtra
55	Redstone Eco-centre	Bhose village	Maharashtra
56	River Valley Society	Sangli	Maharashtra
57	Ruchie Farmers' Network	Wayanad	Kerala
58	Samagra Vikas	Bengaluru	Karnataka
59	Samaj Parivartan Samudaya	Dharwad	Karnataka
60	Samruddhi	New Delhi	New Delhi
61	Saurav Gram Vikas Pratishthan	Satara	Maharashtra
62	Saurwin Inc.	Ohaio	USA
63	School of Environment	Jalgaon	Maharashtra
64	SEVA	Satara	Maharashtra
65	Shramik Sahayog	Chiplun	Maharashtra
66	Shri Vijaysingh Yadav Arts and Science College	Peth Vadgaon	Maharashtra
67	SIBER College	Satara	Maharashtra
68	Slow Food	Mumbai	Maharashtra
69	St. Edmund'd College	Shillong	Meghalaya
70	SVS Junior College	Sawantwadi	Maharashtra
71	Swallows Indien-Bangladesh	Bengaluru	Karnataka
72	Terre Policy Centre	Pune	Maharashtra
73	The Ecological Solutions	Pune	Maharashtra
74	Tribal Foundation	Kanyakumari	Tamilnadu
75	Vanarai	Pune	Kolhapur
76	Vriksh	Puducherry	Puducherry
77	Wildlife and We Protection Foundation	Mumbai	Maharashtra
78	Wildlife Institute of India	Nainital	Uttarakhand
79	Y. C College	Satara	Maharashtra

80	Zoo Outreach Organization	Coimbatore	Tamilnadu
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List of the conclave participants is available on
www.savethewesternghats.org

Annexure 2

Speaker Profiles

1. Mr. Anupam Mishra

Mr. Anupam Mishra is a renowned environmentalist and Author. He is working with the Gandhi Peace Foundation has initiated serious writing on environmental issues in the country. Mr. Mishra is known world over for his painstaking documentation of traditional water harvesting systems of Rajasthan and later for their promotion and rejuvenation. He is the winner of 'Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar' and the author of books like 'Ab bhi khare hain Talab' and Rajasthan Ki Rajat Bunde. These books have been translated in many Indian and foreign languages. Mr. Mishra has been a board member of Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi and part of the team that compiled first two State of India's Environment Reports, published by CSE.

2. Prof. Madhav Gadgil

Prof. Gadgil is a crusading ecologist, founder of Centre for Ecological Studies Bangalore, winner of prestigious civilian award **Padm Vibhushan** by Government of India along with many international awards and accolades for his contribution to the field of ecology. He is the author of well known books like 'This Fissured Land' and 'Ecology and Equity'. He was Chairperson of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel and a strong proponent of conservation in the Western Ghats. Prof. Gadgil has been responsible for drafting the Biodiversity Act of India and has been a strong proponent of community's knowledge and its role in conservation of natural resources.

3. Prof. M. K Prasad

Prof. Prasad is the pioneer of the Silent Valley Movement in Kerala. This movement was spearheaded by him with the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad. This agitation is a milestone in the environmental history of India. Prof. Prasad is a huge inspiration for all ecologists. Prof. Prasad has been responsible for a nationwide drive of environmental awareness in schools and colleges when the term environmental education was not known to many in India. Prof. Prasad has been a great source of inspiration to save the Western Ghats March of 1987-88.

4. Mr. S. R Hiremath

Mr. Hiremath is the founder/director of the Samaj Parivartan Samudaya, Dharwad, Karnataka. He is a renowned activist and coordinator for the state of Karnataka during the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88. He has successfully organized many peoples' struggles in Karnataka against mining, river pollution and forest

rights. His knowledge intelligence and leadership for environmental issues and consistency has been source of inspiration since last 25 years.

5. Mr. Phrang Roy

Mr. Roy is the coordinator of Indigenous Partnerships for Agro-biodiversity and Food Sovereignty. He works on the issues of local food security and Indigenous cultures. He is the former Assistant Director of International Fund of Agricultural Development. Mr. Roy served at IFAD as Vice President and supported promotion of agrobiodiversity of various local and indigenous communities across the globe. He has developed a network of organizations and individuals working for indigenous food culture and agrobiodiversity.

6. Dr. V. B Mathur

Dr. Mathur is the Dean of Wildlife Institute of India, Nainital. He played a pivotal role in presenting the candidature of 39 sites in the Western Ghats to the UNESCO and getting these sites the coveted status of World Heritage Site.

7. Mr. Sanjay Upadhayay

Mr. Upadhayaya is a Supreme Court Lawyer and takes keen interest in the legal aspects of environmental issues in India. Mr. Upadhyay is a Founder of India's First Environmental law firm The Enviro Leagal Defense Firm (ELDF) established in 1999. ELDF is an independent team of erudite legal professional working under his leadership to provide legal support to individuals, government, and NGOs for environmental issues.

8. Mr. Pushkin Phartiyal

Mr. Phartiyal is a fellow of LEAD and the Executive Director of the Central Himalayan Environment Association, based in Nainital. He works on the issues of hill states and hill people and is currently involved in the Indian Mountain Initiative.

9. Mr. R. Ajayan

Mr. Ajayan is the Convener of the Plachimeda Solidarity Committee. He is an activist and has played a crucial role in mobilizing the people against the giant corporate house, Coca-Cola to fight for their rights.

10. Mr. Abhilash Khandekar

Apart from being a senior and reputed journalist, Mr. Khandekar is an Environment lover and takes interest in issues of ecology. He is currently the Editor of the Dainik

Divya Marathi of Dainik Bhaskar group , one of the largest circulating newspapers in Maharashtra.

11. Prof. Madhav Pendse

Prof. Pendse is a renowned botanist and a vocal advocate of environmental education. He is retired Principal of S.P College, Pune. He is a Managing Committee member of Applied Environmental Research Foundation and has provided valued guidance to planning process of Mahabaleshwar Conclave.

12. Mr. Madhu Ramnath

Mr. Ramnath is a member of the Save the Western Ghats group and is a widely published author. He worked in Bastar, Chattisgarh amongst the Indigenous communities on Forest rights and Non-Timber forest products exchange for over two decades. At present he works with Palni Hills Conservation council and is based in Kodaikanal . Plants and people of the forests are his passion.

13. Mr. Somnath Sen

Mr. Sen is a senior advisor at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bengaluru. He has extensively worked on the issues of Urban Management, Environmental Services Delivery, Natural Resource Management and Energy issues. He is also a member of the Save the Western Ghats Group. Mr. Sen had contributed to the understanding of water and sanitation issues and the solutions through the World Bank driven projects in India as well as in many countries of Asia.

14. Mr. Pratim Roy

Mr. Roy is one of the Founder Directors of the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri. He works in the Nilgiris with members of indigenous communities. He is also a member of the Save the Western Ghats Group. He works on the issues of environmental governance.

15. Ms. Snehlata Nath

Ms. Nath is one of the Founder Directors of the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri. She works in the Nilgiris for conservation of agrobiodiversity and livelihoods of indigenous people. She is also a member of the Save the Western Ghats Group and coordinator of South Asian MFP EP Network

16. Ms. Kavita Wankhade

Ms. Wankhade is a consultant at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bengaluru. Her work at present focuses on Environmental Sustainability in Indian cities.

17. Mr. Rajiv Raman

Mr. Raman is an independent researcher working on urban waste management. His work is primarily focused around the city of Bangalore.

18. Ms. Parineeta Dandekar

Ms. Dandekar works with the South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers and People . She is actively involved in flagging concerns about large development projects and their impacts on ecosystems and livelihoods of people. She is also a part of the Save the Western Ghats group.

19. Ms. Parimal Chaudhary

Ms. Chaudhary is the founder-Ddirector of the Praj Foundation a CSR initiative of Praj Industries, based in Pune. Praj Industries are one of the leading manufacturers of ethanol. They are also actively involved in forest conservation through their corporate social responsibility ventures.

20. Ms. Shaiontoni Bose

Ms. Bose is a well published story writer and has many books to her credit. She works on indigenous nature based stories collected from indigenous and local people.

21. Dr. Jay Samant

Dr. Samant heads the Development Research Awareness and Action Institute (DEVRAI) in Kolhapur. He has established Department of Environmental science at Shivaji University , Kolhapur. Dr. Samant was organizer of the Save The Western Ghats March for Southern Maharashtra and prepared first Maharashtra Ecologically Sensitive Area proposal for Northern Western Ghats in 2006.

22. Ms. Hema Ramani

Ms. Ramani is a lawyer associated with the Bombay Environmental Action group, Mumbai. Hema has been following the issues of hill station development and environmental Impacts especially in Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani years for many years.

23. Mr. Guruprasad Malkar

Mr. Malkar is a young lawyer who works on environmental litigations through his organization Enviro-Legal Forum in Kolhapur.

24. Dr. Minoo Parabia

Dr. Parabia is the retired Head of the Department, Department of Biosciences, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat. He has worked extensively on medicinal plants in the Western Ghats and his research publications are held in high regard.

25. Mr. Milind Ratnaparkhi

Mr. Ratnaparkhi is an entrepreneur based in the United States of America. Robotics Engineer by professions, he works on sustainable, non-conventional energy sources. He has been working on small scale hybrid wind and solar technology suitable for Indian villages.

26. Mr. Shrinivas Gogate

Mr. Gogate is an entrepreneur from Mumbai and has been working in his native village in North Western Ghats for Environmental Conservation through Shree Charitable Trust. With the group of sensitive businesses from Mumbai he had initiated a number of conservation activities like watershed development, tree plantation and conservation of forests in Ratnagiri district.

27. Ms. Bhakti Nephertiti

Ms. Bhakti is founder of *Vriksh* an organization that works for tree plantations and tree care. Planted trees in Himachal for few years and worked with schools and government now working in Western Ghats, bringing youth perspective to Save the Western Ghats movement is her goal and she is a member of Save the Western Ghats group since 2011.

AERF Team

-  Ms. Prtaysha Rath
-  Ms. Supriya Kulkarni
-  Mr. Chandrahas Chaugule
-  Mr. Chintamani Kamble
-  Mr. Umesh Hiremath
-  Mr. Bhavendu Joshi
-  Mr. Bhalachandra Wadke
-  Mr. Nitin Salve
-  Mr. Yogesh Giri
-  Mr. Kailas Gawand
-  Mr. Sanjay Pashte
-  Mr. Kundlik Kondhawale
-  Mr. Bharat Dalvi
-  Mr. Jayant Sarnaik
-  Dr. Archana Godbole

Volunteers

1. Ms. Bhaygyshree Wadke
2. Ms. Jyoti Upadhyay
3. Mr. Milan Kulkarni
4. Mr. Pranav Jejurikar
5. Mr. Nikhil Jejurikar

Local Organizing Committee

1. Dr. Madhukar Bachulkar, Nisarg Mitra Kohapur
2. Ms. Sahalja Phatak, Mumbai
3. Dr. Jay samant, Devrai, Kolhapur
4. Mr. Makarand Brahme, peninsula Land limited, Business Head
5. Dr. G.S. Chinchani, prof. Of Botany (retd.)
6. Ms. Vandana Kulkarni, AERF, Mumbai
7. Mr. Alhad Godbole, Journalist, Mumbai
8. Mr. Uday Pahtak, C.S. Mumbai
9. Mr. Vijay Magikar, Event Consultant, Pune
10. Mr. Kiran Rahalkar, Nasik Nature conservation trust, Nasik
11. Mr. Vinod Patil, Khandesh Nature Conservation Society, Jalgaon