

RESISTANCE REVISITED

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



The Chutka Anti- Nuclear Power Plant Movement Madhya Pradesh



WRN Community Conversations

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

The India CCs in the first round focused on 'conflict-affected areas'. The notion of a conflict situation was interpreted as broader than a 'militarised zone'. The result was a mix conventional conflicts engaging with the border districts of Jammu & Kashmir and Tripura, peoples' democratic resistance movements against land acquisition and dispossession in Jagatsinghpur, and communal violence and its aftermath in Kandhamal, Odisha.

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

Displacement caused by either by armed conflict or predatory development continues to be an often forgotten reality across the region. This third round of CC documents people's resistance against a proposed Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Chutka, Madhya Pradesh as a part of a continued struggle against predatory form of development and multiple displacements as well as the response of the state.

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

Key Findings:

- **Multiple Displacements:** For the villagers, living in the area surrounding the proposed plant site, having been displaced twice earlier during the Bargi dam construction, a nuclear plant in and around the village is a revival of the threat of forced displacement. There are in fact 54 villages that will bear the dangerous consequences of the NPP.
- **Adhoc responses by the state:** Unlike refugees, IDPs continue to reside in their country of origin and therefore have a constitutional right to protection by the state. However, the reality is that often such situations are met with ad hoc policies of the state which fail the promises to the displaced and is often fraught with corruption.
- **Impunity of the state** - Violation of the Vth schedule of the constitution, and the PESA Kanoon, along with continued defiance of the opposition and rejection of the Gram Sabhas is one of the most significant unconstitutional action committed by the state. In addition to this, the state continues to push for the NPP in utter denial of the potential hazard to the people and the environment, and the required environmental clearance. The blatant use of the threat of force by different state authorities much to the chagrin of the people indicates another example of state impunity.
- **Women as important flag-bearers of the movement:** one aspect that makes this movement particularly different and more progressive from many others is that women have not been instrumentalised in this movement by the men. This is evident in the way the women participate in the decision-making and executive bodies. In fact, being a part of the movement has been a liberating experience for the women, and emboldened them to continue with the quest for reaffirming their rights.

"This was the struggle for the land and not about saving our life. We do not fear being arrested, as it is a matter of our rights on our lands". – a woman activist from the movement.
- **Strength in alliance building with other movements** - The anti-chutka NPP movement does not see itself in isolation and works in close alliance with other similar people's movements like the NBA and NAPM. The issues of these three movements are many a times over-lapping, and the community believes that they draw their strength of perseverance from their fellow brethren across these movements. The strategy of alliance building also makes a strong case for the people of the movement as it highlights the interlinkages of the myriad issues that are of pertinent concern to them.

- **Sustainability of the movement despite socio-political and economic marginalisation-**

Despite hailing from marginalised communities who have been repeatedly deprived of their rights by the state, the self-sustainability of the movement is commendable. It not only underscores the sheer power of perseverance of such grassroots movements but also the compelling needs of the communities so affected.

A woman recounts, “We went from village to village on foot...we did foot marches and more and more men and women started joining the movement. Our unity started becoming strong, making our organization larger and larger. Whatever we achieved smallest to biggest rights, it was through our movement.”

- **NPPs – a contentious project** – while the people of the movement educated themselves to provide a systemic analysis of the dangers of NPP, the state still pushes for it ignoring all warning indicators from around the world. The movement continuously points out how NPPs pose serious, permanent and irreversible damages to both the environment and human health, especially with the release of boiling water from the plants or the existence of radioactive waste in the natural surroundings. However, despite a trend of decommissioning NPPs around the world, India continues to move forward with setting up of nuclear power plant projects, some proposed and some already active, in the name of development, infrastructural expansion and employment generation.
- **Contest between these voices and the mainstream narratives** - While the mainstream narratives continue to portray such predatory development projects as markers of a prosperous and “shining” India, it is these voices that bring forth the reality and the human and environmental costs of such large-scale developmental projects. These two different sets of narratives that bear clear evidence to the two varied sets of aspirations of the unequal citizenry that operates in this country.
- **Role of media** - The media which is supposed to be the fourth pillar of a democratic state remained largely ignorant of this significant people’s movement. Most reportage regarding the movement was constrained to local media and did not see a bottom-up approach in the national media until 2017. While alternate media forums had covered the issue, the mainstream national media gave very limited coverage.

Demands and Recommendations

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

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

WRN's Recommendations:

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

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

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