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Kanchi Kohli



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Quick background



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- **Education:** 1. M.A. Social Work (Urban and Rural Community Development, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai; 2. B.A. Sociology, Hindu College, University of Delhi
- Working for the past 6 years with KV. Last 2.5 years purely on campaign support and advocacy for local issues
- Started work in Uttar Kannada among rural people and quickly realised that an ecologically sensitive area like Uttara Kannada, environment is a people's issue. Livelihoods are dependant on an estuary which is going to be destroyed by a proposed port; forests which are intricately linked with people's cultures and ways of life will be submerged because of the dam. This made her quickly deepen her work into Environment & Development (E&D) area.
- Involved in the path breaking NBSAP project done by KV for MoEF. Also was a member of the 15 member Technical and Policy Core Group for drafting the action plan
- The NBSAP work led to the appreciation of ecological process and the value they hold, with and without livelihoods being dependant on them. Ecosystems like forests, wetlands, coasts and so on have a clear role in the livelihood on the people who depend on them and also on the people who use them.
- Works with Supreme court lawyer Ritwick Dutta on the forest case update (www.forestcaseupdate.org) to document clearly the complicated SC cases on forests.
- Regularly writes on development and environment issues in print and webbased media for the last 6 years (some publications include downtoearth magazine, hindustantimes, indiatogether, hindu)



A chronicle of her work – Initial days



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- Member of a research team comprising of students and faculty of TISS to study the prevalence of malnutrition deaths amongst Korku tribal children in Amravati District of Maharashtra. (1996)
- Worked as a Research Assistant TISS on the project 'Learning from the People', a comparative study on the people's perspective on malnutrition deaths in Amravati and Thane districts of Maharashtra. (1997)
- Part of a team, which presented a proposal to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, India, titled 'Proposal for declaring regions the Western Ghats stretch of North Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra as Ecologically Sensitive Area'. (1999-2000)
- Worked in NBSAP with Kalpavriksh which was the nodal agency for NBSAP implementation.
- Hands on support to local groups in Uttara Kannada on environment clearance issues, including sand mining, barge mounted power plant etc.
- Hands on support for remote groups based in Chattisgarh, HP, Uttranchal, etc and link them with Delhi level infrastructure such as legal support, policy support, etc.

A chronicle...



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- **July 2000 to present (and ongoing):** Working as Member, Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group based in Delhi. The work is essentially related to campaign and advocacy on various environment and biodiversity issues, which includes support to grassroots groups in different parts of the country including Chattisgarh, Uttaranchal and some states of North East India.
 - She played a very important role in coordinating the Campaign for Environment Justice, India (CEJ-I) along with Environment Support Group which included MoEF “Suno” and MoEF “chalo”.
- **May 2004 onwards (ongoing):** Co-coordinating an Information Dissemination Service for Forest and Wildlife Cases in the Supreme Court. This includes putting together a monthly electronic newsletter (Forest Case Update) through which information and analysis on past orders/judgments/petitions is disseminated.
www.forestcaseindia.org
- **October 2004 to May 2005:** Co-authored a status report on Environment Impact Assessment Notification in the eleven years of existence. The report titled ‘Eleven Years of Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 1994: How Effective Has It Been? It looks at the various amendments to the notification, the issues with practice and implementation, critiques the proposed reforms process and brings together a set of recommendations. The report was printed in **May 2005 and released in June 2005.**
- **February 2005:** Assisted in updating the information in the publication, ‘*Large Dams in North East India: a Dossier*’, which was published in July 2005.

A chronicle...



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➤ **December 2000 to March 2004:** Worked as Member, Technical and Policy Core Group (TPCG) and Counterpart to Coordinator, TPCG of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Project (NBSAP). Work profile included:

- Liaison with Ministry of Environment and Forests, UNDP, administrative and other related agencies
- Overall coordination with 74 executing agencies who have been preparing Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans in States, Substate Sites, Ecoregional and on Themes.
- Specific coordination and involvement with the preparation of Biodiversity Action Plans for Rajasthan State, Arvari substate site and Aravalli ecoregion
- Member of the Core Drafting Group of the National Action Plan for the NBSAP.
- Documenting in Detail the entire NBSAP Process
- Editing a bimonthly newsletter NBSAP News (14 issues)

➤ **June 2003 - December 2003:** Received a Media Fellowship from Oxfam to write on environment/biodiversity related issues in the national media.

➤ **June 1999 - May 2000:** Worked in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka through an independent

fellowship from Oxfam (India) Trust)

- Advocacy and Networking Support to NGOs and people's groups working in Uttara Kannada district on forestry and environment issues.
- Organizing and conducting training sessions and workshops on themes related to environmental law and conservation, with professional groups, NGOs and local government representatives.
- Creation and Dissemination of resource material like slides, pamphlets, posters and relevant documents in Kannada and English.



A chronicle...



- **June 1998 to May 2000:** Worked under the Western Ghats Forestry Project through a fellowship from Oxfam (India) Trust in Uttara Kannada District of Karnataka)
Research and documentation support to NGOs working on environmental issues in Uttara Kannada.
Working with NGOs and local communities to develop strategies to deal with environmental issues in their region.
Networking with research and advocacy groups outside the district for detailed analysis of the impacts of development projects on the livelihoods of local communities.



Work with local communities



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One of important facet of Kanchi's work is working with local communities in their important livelihood issues. This slide and next slides chronicles that facet.

- Support to kv's partners like the beej bachao andolan in Uttaranchal to counter mining in kataldi village
- Working with Jan Chetna in raigarh on environment clearance issues vis a vis industries in their district. Local communities in this area a facing the detrimental impacts of indiscriminate industrialisation. One interacts with project affected communities for information exchange and support everytime one visits raigarh.
- Though one has not been able to participate in many public hearings for unable to travel to areas (finances), look into papers, advise on strategy, do preparatory work. One has in the past explained processes to Matu people's organisation (uttaranchal), Beej Bachao Andolan, Jan Chetna, local groups in Sikkim and Manipur. The scale of involvement differs. Sometimes one spends time on the phone with community representatives like from Himachal Pradesh, and at other times one is able to be there physically at the scene of the action.
- Travelling to unheard of places like koriya in Chhatisgarh on the invitation of Adivasi Adhikar Samiti, a tribal people's organization on forest felling and related issues.
- Help with understanding complexities of issues sitting along with local groups, and prepare grounds for litigation, contact lawyers, and follow up the case in delhi.

Work with local communities...



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- Help highlight most of the issues one works on in the media. Located in remote areas most of these groups don't have access to mainstream media and local people's issues get lost.
- Be part of collective protests in delhi and other parts of the country. E.g. central to organizing the collective protests in December 2004 on the campaign for community control over biodiversity (protest against the implementation of the biodiversity legislation), moef chalo in Delhi.
- These are collective protests of tribals, forest dwellers and many other local communities on issues they are most affected by. Apart from organizing some of these with them (on eia or other biodiversity issues), one attempts to be a part of a few others campaigns and lend support.
- I have however attended public hearings like the Nalwa Sponge Iron hearing in Raigarh. But regular contact on the phone, inputs through letters/emails often helps in understanding and challenging the loopholes of all stages of the environment clearance process, from the stage of the public hearing (when one first gets to know of the project!) to post environment clearance monitoring and compliance.
- As a member of the TPCG, I was directly associated with the drafting of he Arvari Basin local site, Aravalli Ecoregion, and Rajasthan state plans. The Arvari region plan was a local community plan, and it required one going to the site a few times over 2 years. One was also part of meetings and public hearings held during the Aravalli ecorgion process.

Community work – Loop between local and national angles



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Many times community struggles/issues has to be worked on national scale also. Below is such an example of Kanchi's work.

- For instance one helped communities in Kataldi/Jardhar in Uttaranchal in their struggle against mining in the area; or groups in Chhatisgarh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh on local strategizing, information and so on.
- This is an important component of one's work. How does it happen:
 - a) groups might contact us saying that they have heard that mining is going to be taken up in their region. Either they travel to Delhi, or I travel to local areas. Look at the papers that they have collected, we discuss as what more is needed. Then read the papers, relate it to laws (eia, forest laws, and any other), see violations, so that one can pin down the project proponents. If there are public meetings, then attend them and lend support.
 - b) groups might contact saying public hearing is coming up, what is this all about? Help understand the process, and how to prepare for it. Look at loopholes in eia reports etc.
 - c) there are national level policy changes in the eia process taking place, which have significant impact on communities, in the way they can participate in environmental decision making. Any response to these changes cannot go without local communities really understanding it, and responding to it...this might be the eia amendments/re-engineering, or the biodiversity rules or anything. Information should reach where it really matters, and that requires one to connect to more and more groups and communities all over the country. This is never enough, and more effort is required to reach out to movements, community based organisations and so on.
 - d) when one builds networks and contacts with community groups, there is regular exchange and harmony at work. Queries come in, one respond, I reach out to learn more.



Publications initiated



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- Co-authored a status report titled 'Eleven Years of Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 1994: How Effective Has It Been? It looks at the various amendments to the notification, the issues with practice and implementation, critiques the proposed reforms process and brings together a set of recommendations. The report was printed in May 2005 and released in June 2005.(2005)
- Compiled a publication titled, Understanding the Biological Diversity Act: A Dossier which puts together current information on the implementation of the legislation and critical issues surrounding the same. It is part of the Campaign on Community Control over Biodiversity (2006)
- Coordinated the preparation of the report Flyover/Grade Separator at T-Junction of Noida Link Road & Master Pan Road No. 2, Noida: Report on key issues, alternate design and restoration, submitted to the Noida Authority (2004).
- Co-Guest Editor for the special issue of Ecologist Asia on Dams in the North East, titled Large Dams in North East India: Rivers, Forests, People and Power (2003)
- Member of Core Drafting Group for the Final Technical Report of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. This was released as a people's plan in October 2005 (2005)
- Co-authored the Process Documentation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (under print)
- Authored several articles in the national media, including newspapers/magazines like Hindu, Hindustan Times, Deccan Herald, Hindu Young World, Hindu Business Line, Frontline, Hindu Survey of the Environment, Sanctuary Asia, Humanscape, Infochange India etc (Ongoing).

How Kanchi fits into AID principles



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- Kanchi works in core areas of environmental laws such as EIA, forest issues, NBSAP, etc all of which are crucial for just and sustainable development of India, a cause dear to AID
- Kanchi work in remote areas such as Chattisgarh, HP, Uttranchal, NE will give AID an handle to the issues of these regions. If you are aware, areas like Chattisgarh is under tremendous pressure to open up forests for logging/mining and Kanchi's work can be expanded here by our support. AID has taken a principled stand on mining/industrialization that people displacement should not be forced and Kanchi's work will be to strengthen unjust and forced displacement of people.
- Her work in policy level issues such as NBSAP, Aravalli basin eco plan, etc are very crucial for sustainable development of India, a cause which is dear to AID.
- Her constant writings in national newspapers, websites etc are a constant remainder to the public who read those in the way that development in India is running amock and we need to balance development with rural people/environment. This has been the stand of AID also.



Future Plans

- Campaign and advocacy support to continue as described in the previous slides
- National level lobbying towards countering the new environment clearance regime
- Connecting with movements, local organisations and broadbase the environment and forest clearance issue to that of social and environmental justice.
- Do more action research on the ground on issues like compliance of environment clearance, appellate authority process so that they can feed into advocacy efforts
- Active media outreach on environment and forest issues.
- Work more with local communities in escalating their issues and if I get consistent support will be helpful in taking up this angle more.