



World Social Forum, 15th-19th February 2024

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About the World Social Forum

Started in 2001, the World Social Forum has been the space for civil society organisations across the world to convene and discuss alternatives to the ongoing crises we are facing, both as specific cultures, and as a global experience. Discussing issues ranging from climate justice, societal turmoil, the wars in Palestine, Ukraine and many other locations, to resource discussions, countering the patriarchy and the economic collapse of so many countries, the World Social Forum's slogan is 'Another World is Possible'.

The WSF takes place in Global South countries, the first one having been in Porto Alegre. This is meant to be a space for open discussion, bringing together many different disciplines and types of networks, organisations and individuals to understand how to counter the polycrisis. To this end, the WSF in Kathmandu, Nepal (from 15th to 19th of February, 2024) had the following themes under which activities would be organised:

- Economic Inequalities and Economic Justice
- Labour, Migration, Modern Slavery and Trafficking
- Caste, Discrimination Based on Work and Descent(DWD), Race, Ethnicity, Indigenous People, Untouchability, Xenophobia, and all forms of Discrimination
- Gender, Sexuality, and Identities and Gender Based Violence
- Land, Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, Agro - Ecology. Energy and Natural Resources
- Peace, Conflict, War, Occupations, Displacements, and Security
- Education, Art and Culture
- Communication, Digital Social Networks, and Media (Digital Equity)
- Democracy, Human Rights, Authoritarianism, Law, and Justice
- Health, Social Protection, and Equity
- Climate Justice, Ecology, Just Transitions, Habitat, and Sustainable Development
- Women, Children, Youth, Adolescents, Aging people and Persons with Disabilities

- Social Movements, Civic Space and Future of World Social Forum

Thus, the sessions were varied, ranging from Adivasi and Dalit rights discussed in “Rights of Women, IPs, and Dalits on Community-Based Forest Management and GESI”, to understanding the role of Media in adding new dimensions in people’s movements explored in “Dialogue Education, Art and Culture in the processes of peoples’ liberation” with many more sessions besides. Apart from that, there was also a rally held on the first day, marching in solidarity, and many cultural programmes and stalls by different movements, networks and organisations holding informal dialogues and discussion spaces.

We hosted four sessions in total, spanning across some of the thematic mentioned above; specifically 2 sessions on going beyond electoral democracy and examining examples of radical democracy in “Radical Democracy and Autonomy: Current Practice and Future Visions”, a session discussing the possibilities of nurturing an Alternatives Confluence across South Asia in “South Asia Vikalp Sangam”, and finally, a session on South Asia’s Bioregionalism and its implications across disciplines in “Nature’s Tapestry: Redefining Boundaries & Territories, An Exploration in South Asia”.

We were able to attend some of the sessions within these thematic as well, especially interested by the “Building The World Social Forum On Transformative Economies In Colombia 2024”, “Food Justice: Quest For Addressing Planetary Health And Global Food Crisis”, and “Towards Peace, Food Sovereignty, and Climate Justice”. Our experiences are elaborated on below.

Day 1: WSF Opening Rally



The opening rally was one of celebration, solidarity and hope, with almost all the 30,000 participants of the World Social Forum attending a March around an area of Kathmandu. People shouted slogans and brought their banners to represent their fight against various issues, ranging from anti-pollution to agricultural rights to the Palestine war. The Rally was very powerful in connecting these diverse movements and complex issues, and set the tone of the World Social Forum: **Another World is Possible**, in many different ways that all interlink together.

Following the rally, the participants gathered in the main square in Bhrikutimandap, in attendance for the speeches made by different activists from various parts of the world talking about the importance of such an event, such as Medha Patkar, Aleida Guevara, and Eric Toussaint. These also set the tone for the next days of discussions and panels.

Day 2: Radical Democracy and Autonomy: Current Practices and Future Visions¹

A panel discussion moderated by Ashish Kothari, these two sessions were aimed at first presenting existing practices of radical democracy, and following up with principles of radical democracy emerging from ground experiences, along with exploring what can be done to spread, deepen, and strengthen radical democracy.



Accordingly, the panel consisted of Necibe Queredaxi,

Rokhosh Shexo and Kendal explaining the Kurdish movement,

Ashish sharing on Adivasi movements in India, Quincy Saul and LAU Kin Chi sharing about the Zapatista movement in Mexico,

Prof. Wen Tiejun expanding upon China's Rural Reconstruction movement, and Thomas Wallgren talking about the Nordic region.

Necibe explored the idea of women being a central part of the Revolution in Rojava, and how the women's liberation is essential to building democracy outside the state; Rokhosh followed up by explaining the importance of this system being self-critical and learning from these mistakes, as well as asserting education for all. Picking up from this, Quincy talked about the Zapatista movement, and their autonomous communities, such as their own hospitals, self-government, and cultural-economic institutions like in Rojava. He also mentioned that the Zapatista and the Kurdish movements are akin to the North and South poles for practitioners of Radical Democracy. LAU Kin Chi elaborated further on the Zapatista idea of collectivism

¹ Please see Annexure for a full list of the participants.

in practice, while respecting individual freedoms. Wen Tiejun added the importance of mass participation in the context of agrarian movements in China, encouraging programs for urban citizens, asking them to join rural spaces. Thomas Wallgren highlighted the context of the Nordic countries, showing that food sovereignty and self-reliance can also be practised in their area of the world. Ashish added the example of Adivasi communities in India creating local self-government, and finally Usha ji from Nepal opened up the possibilities of creating similar spaces of Radical Democracy and the challenges of preventing Nepal losing its hard-won secular status and becoming a Hindu nation again.

Through these examples, the speakers were able to bring out 4 main themes of discussion: 1) Collectivism, 2) Non-hierarchicalism, 3) Constant education, and 4) Food sovereignty and autonomy. These themes informed the extremely interesting second session, making it more nuanced; the floor was opened up for an open discussion on different understandings of Democracy.

A participant from the Ivory Coast agreed on the importance of women's role in Radical Democracy, following Necibe's



presentation on the Jineoloji Academy. The conversation was taken to the possibilities of imagining democracy outside the Nation-State, along with understanding the need for creating processes interwoven with Nature; finding a way to integrate natural systems and human systems. Thinkers like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Marx and Ocalan were discussed as well.

Some of the outcomes of these sessions included a more comprehensive understanding of Radical Democracy on the participants' end, opportunities for further networking and outreach, and an increase in the members signing up for the RED website email list.

Please find detailed minutes of the two sessions here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Pzg2AXtqb-FwawF0kGLJh2nZfm5PILAkecosVVJP33w/edit>

Day 3: South Asia Vikalp Sangam²

The South Asia Vikalp Sangam session was to present the Vikalp Sangam process, so that other countries in South Asia could nurture similar processes in their own spaces. Steered by Milind Wani, there were quite a number of organisations from Nepal and Bangladesh present, among them DigoBikas Institute, People for Himalayan Development, and National Association of Rural Municipalities.



Sujatha Padmanabhan and some other veteran members of Vikalp Sangam shared about the Vikalp Sangam process, focussing on the structure of the network, the Flower of Transformation as an Alternative Framework and its interdisciplinary capacities, and the ways in which this process has grown over the past 10 years. Tying in with the World Social Forum's slogan 'Another World is Possible', the Vikalp Sangam process challenged the idea of Development in 2014 when it was started, and a search for this alternative commenced. In this 10 year journey, Vikalp Sangam at the micro level has gone beyond just sustainability of

nature, rather looking within the connections between the micro and the macro, integrating many points of view; that is how we counter the state.

Some questions arising from the participants were around the network benefiting from the network and vice versa, the feasibility of joining this network if they were already part of pre-

² Please see Annexure for a full list of the participants.

existing networks, the ways of holding Sangams, and Advocacy issues. Emerging out of this discussion came the resolve to nurture such Alternatives Confluences in other South Asian countries, especially Nepal; the participants were especially heartened by the understanding that such a network would provide solidarity, making the prospect of facing threats easier with the force of a collective network.



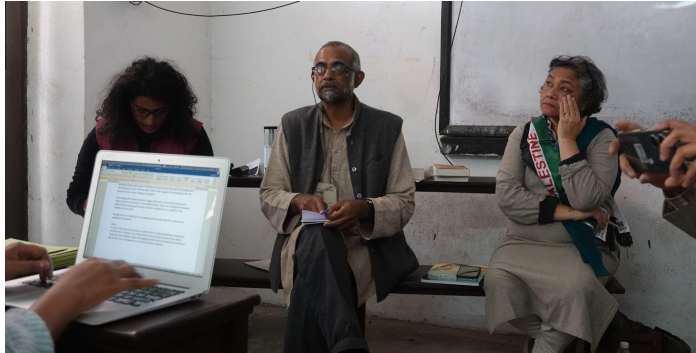
The emotional burdens we carry are also lessened through the existence of other organisations that understand the threat. Apart from that, the possibilities of an ‘exchange program’ of sorts between networks also emerged out of discussions, for instance sending an organisation’s representative into another country’s network to help connect the two networks more strongly. Nepali and Bangladeshi groups have now been invited to the National Vikalp Sangam happening in November, to understand the Vikalp Sangam network in a more earthy way.

Some outcomes from this session included speaking to different groups for stories for the Radical Ecological Democracy website, and networking to further widen the outreach of the RED space as well.

Please find detailed minutes of the session here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gcNCbWRx0dHxm06WfqUvsmjhDHH_z6K7/edit

Day 4: Nature's Tapestry- Redefining Boundaries & Territories, An Exploration in South Asia³



This session was organised by the South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group, and explored reconfiguring boundaries according to bioregions rather than enforcing political boundaries stemming from colonial expansion. An open discussion

format steered by a panel composed of Nisha Mary Poulouse, Ashish Kothari, Manu Bhatnagar, Sehjo Singh and others, this session enriched many perspectives and presented a new solution to climate justice and socio-cultural issues: Another World based on reconfigured Bioregional boundaries.

This bioregionalism enquiry started as a deep exploration, and the panel related its history as well as its potential in many different fields. There is no real alignment between political maps and geographical maps, and their incongruence has resulted in most problems we face today. The panellists presented many different perspectives; Manu ji expanded on the actual process of this Bioregional mapping in India done by the working group, Sehjo explored the impact such an approach has had on Adivasi communities and their understanding of the land they steward, Ashish talked about examples around the world of such a Bioregional mapping such as the European Union and a part of the Amazon jungle, and Nisha centred the discussion on the shifting nature of bioregional boundaries.



³ Please see Annexure for a full list of the participants.



The discussion was especially enriched by perspectives on sharing resources, bridging the gap between historical notions of boundaries and present day reality, the amount of internal decolonisation needed, and many others. The outcomes of this session included exploring Radical Ecological Democracy in this space, outreach for the RED website leading to possible stories and additions to the RED mailing list.

Please find detailed minutes of the session here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hIz9AFjVoP0clT0XTUYFFo7eJcWEksaA/edit>

Other sessions we attended at the World Social Forum

Towards Peace, Food Sovereignty, and Climate Justice

16 Feb, 2024

At this panel organised by the International Council of the WSF, Ashish Kothari spoke about the intersections between ecological and climate justice, the security of basic needs, the need for radical democracy, and approaches to peace and non-violence. Working at these intersections and respecting a pluriverse of approaches found across the world, a global movement needs to be built to counter the dominant forces of capitalism, statism, patriarchy, racism and neo-colonialism. Other panellists from Brazil, Nepal, Sweden and France spoke on the subjects from their own contexts. Some of the substance of the panel discussion entered a draft declaration on Peace and Justice for the Whole World, issued by the WSF Assembly of Social Struggles on the last day.

Food Justice: Quest for Addressing the Planetary Heath and Global Food Crisis

17 Feb, 2024

At this panel discussion organised by the Nepal Alliance of Agriculture for Food, Ashish Kothari representing Kalpavriksh, Vikalp Sangam, Global Tapestry of Alternatives, and REDWeb, and Alex Jensen of Local Futures, who is also on the GTA Facilitation Team, were part of a panel of speakers from Nepal, India, Zambia, and USA. Panellists spoke of their experience with the politics of food and agriculture and how corporate and state domination of agricultural policies has created ecological and livelihoods crises, especially for small-holder farmers. They also presented agro-ecological initiatives by farmers, that are addressing the crises, and presenting radical alternatives to the currently dominant system.

Building the World Social Forum on Transformative Economies

17 Feb, 2024

Organised by groups active in the World Social Forum on Transformative Economies, a process that began in 2021, this panel discussion featured speakers from India, Latin America and Hong Kong. Ashish Kothari, representing Kalpavriksh, Vikalp Sangam, Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA), and REDWeb, spoke about the crises created by neoliberal, capitalist and state-dominated paradigms of economic development, and grounded initiatives in India and other parts of the world that are presenting radical alternative practices and concepts to these paradigms. Lau Kin Chi of the Global Sustainability University, a GTA endorser, talked about the rural reconstruction movement in China and other such initiatives. There are plans to host a global gathering on transformative economies in Colombia in late 2024, which GTA and REDweb hope to contribute to.

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