

Forests For All: Intersectional Climate & Environmental Resilience

16th June 2021

Naturenomics™ Dialogues vol. 2: 16th June – 7th July 2021

Forests are the key to life on earth today, providing clean air, food and water security, fuel, medicines and livelihoods to billions globally. Indirectly, their ecosystems services are the silent machinery that keep critical economic systems functioning – enriching soil, preventing floods, habitats for pollinators, preventing pathogen spillover, regulating rainfall and keeping the planet cool. For the Eastern Himalayan region, forests are a lifeline for its communities. 70% of the region is rural and depends on agriculture or forestry, in one way or the other, for income. Much of this is direct dependence via forest-dependent livelihoods such as non-timber forest produce, timber or fuelwood. In mountainous regions, estimates suggest that over 30% of household consumption expenditure depends on community forests.

India's recently completed Climate Vulnerability Assessment report highlights the critical role forests play in building climate resilience. Assam, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh rank among the most climate vulnerable states, followed by Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, with poor forest coverage proportionate to rural population, rain-fed agriculture and incomes dependent heavily on natural resources.

Climate vulnerability, however, is not evenly distributed. Some communities are more vulnerable to climate threats than others – and within communities, certain groups of people may be even more vulnerable to having their lives and livelihoods disrupted by climate threats. Within rural communities, indigenous communities in the Eastern Himalayas are especially prone because of higher multidimensional poverty levels (>40% in 33 of 118 districts in North East India) and higher nature-dependence: whether this is direct reliance on ecosystems services or forest resources. Climate risks to nature-dependent livelihoods spiral into other threats: conflict over resources, rising poverty and unsafe migration as communities seek better economic prospects elsewhere.

Within both rural and indigenous communities, women, furthermore, have even poorer climate resilience and adaptive capacities. Rising poverty and unsafe migration disproportionately affect women, at risk from trafficking. Women in the Eastern Himalayas are also disproportionately responsible for gathering forest produce, but rarely enjoy the financial benefits despite matrilineal systems in several communities. Overall land ownership is more egalitarian in the Eastern Himalayas, however, the management of these assets and access to financial benefits disproportionately skew towards men. Meanwhile, there is little to no government data on the climate resilience of the queer community in the Eastern Himalayas, or the impact of ecological degradation on the community. Global information suggests that higher poverty and limited access to social assets like healthcare makes the community vulnerable to climate threats and health conditions linked to ecological degradation e.g. pollution etc.

Exploring the impacts of climate instability and environmental degradation on indigenous communities, women, migration & trafficking and the queer community in the Eastern Himalayas, this panel will also discuss how a rewilding economy around forests could foster an equitable resilience to rising climate threats and their effects, across these communities.



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OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what climate & environmental vulnerability means in practical, everyday terms for indigenous communities, women and the queer community
2. Explore how ecological degradation and climate risks combine with other complex social, political and economic factors to threaten at risk communities
3. Explore the value of ideas such as climate and environmental justice within the Eastern Himalayan context
4. Discuss how building a rewilding-centred economy could untangle some of the social, political, economic and ecological risk factors that threaten vulnerable communities in the Eastern Himalayas
5. Define how the rewilding economy has to be designed to create targeted positive outcomes for women, indigenous people and the queer community in the Eastern Himalayas

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do climate risks and environmental risks impact indigenous communities & women?
2. How do conflict and migration link to climate & environmental threats? How do these broader social risks impact these communities?
3. How do we tackle these issues at their root cause?
4. What are the ongoing conversations & struggles on climate & environmental justice in the region?
5. What would an equitable rewilding economy look like? What needs to be changed to drive equitable outcomes for women & indigenous people?
6. As we celebrate Pride month, how does climate & environment-driven risks impact the queer community? How do we build greater climate & ecological resilience and equitable outcomes while building a space for the community?



Rewilding the Future

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Green is in. As the world gears up to set key climate goals at COP26 in Glasgow this year, countries and corporations are racing to institute new policies to limit carbon emissions and invest in sustainable business models and practices. Countries like China and the US have outlined ambitious programmes to ramp up government spending to aid a complete renewable energy transition while creating jobs for their economies and strengthening their GDP.

For climate vulnerable regions like the Eastern Himalayas, even a 1.5 C rise will transform its climate, impacting everything from its water sources, to the crops that can be grown, its biodiversity and by extension, the lives of the 246 million people living there. Climate resilience is poor: people lack access to resources that could help them weather these changes. For a primarily agrarian community, swift action is not a choice, it is a necessity, beginning with its rich natural assets.

The Eastern Himalayan region suffers from the historical problem of being natural capital rich, but money poor. As the world sets goals for the future of climate and biodiversity, the Eastern Himalayan region must seize this opportunity to take the lead on a new future for people and biodiversity.

Last year, at the 8th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, the Balipara Foundation held multiple conversations on the theme of **Ecology is Economy**. Building on these conversations and the key outcomes from this forum, this series of the Naturenomics™ Dialogues will explore and debate the theme of **Rewilding the Future**: moving beyond rewilding as a means of restoring the complexity of our natural ecosystems, to restoring the interdependence between our natural, social and economic systems by building a new, natural capital economy participatorily led and stewarded by indigenous and rural communities. This is the first step on the path to equitable climate resilience for people and biodiversity in the Eastern Himalayas.

Through this series, we explore the role that our rich forests can play in our wellbeing and resilience, in mitigating climate threats and its social repercussions, how to create an equitable ecological budget and how a rewilding economy could help communities achieve greater agency over setting their own development and wellbeing priorities beyond the limitations of the GDP. These key themes will serve as an introduction to the critical themes and conversations of the 9th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, as we continue to explore the idea of **Ecology is Economy** and shape the future of the Eastern Himalayas, its people, biodiversity and economy.



BALIPARA FOUNDATION

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ABOUT THE NATURENOMICS™ DIALOGUES

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues is a digital offshoot of the the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum. It aims to bring together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to debate pressing issues and opportunities for action in ecology, economy & community-centred conservation with a focus on the Eastern Himalayan region – India's North East, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and China.

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues is part of a broader initiative to pivot our flagship forum, the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, to meet the challenges of the “new normal” through digitization.

The Naturenomics™ Dialogues will return next month, to explore new themes and questions, some raised over these sessions, for creating Rural Futures in the Eastern Himalayas.

ABOUT THE EASTERN HIMALAYAN NATURENOMICS™ FORUM

The Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum is a global, interdisciplinary platform that brings together businesses, communities, the development sector, conservationists and academics to foster knowledge sharing, and generate grassroots actionable solutions to create Rural Futures across the Eastern Himalayas. Since 2020, the Forum has focused on the theme of **Ecology is Economy** for the region's future.

First instituted in 2013, the Forum has evolved and branched out into regional forums, the first of which was held in Sikkim in 2019, followed by a forum in Bhutan in 2020. The Forum held 12 digital editions of the regional forums in 2020 across all the states and countries of the Eastern Himalayas, and in 2021, held physical forums in Bangladesh and Manipur.



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2000+
Participants



20+
Countries



100+
Discussion
Topics

9TH
EASTERN HIMALAYAN
NATURENOMICS™ FORUM
7-11 DECEMBER 2021

