
[India: wildlife conservation and people's rights](#)

A group of about 20 social activists, wildlife conservationists, researchers, lawyers, and mediapersons met from 10 to 12 April, 1997, at Bhikampura- Kishori in Alwar District, adjacent to the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan (western India). The meeting, called by the Indian Institute of Public Administration and Kalpavriksh, and hosted by Tarun Bharat Sangh, was an attempt to initiate a dialogue between those advocating the cause of wildlife protection and those struggling to uphold the human rights of rural communities living in and around wildlife habitats. Over the last few years, conflicts have erupted in many of India's national parks, sanctuaries, and other natural habitats, between officials and NGOs involved in wildlife conservation on the one hand, and local communities and social activists on the other hand. Clashes between the Forest Department and local people are increasingly common. A top-down, centralised model of conservation, which has ignored the dependence of local communities on the resources of natural habitats, as also their traditions of conservation, is one root of this conflict; other factors include the increasing politicisation and commercialisation of rural areas, breakdown of traditions, and the demands made by growing populations of people and livestock, all of which clash with conservation goals. Simultaneously, wildlife and wildlife habitats continue to be destroyed by the dominant industrial-commercial economy, and the rampant consumerism of the rich minority. The same governments which declared protected areas (national parks and sanctuaries) are today eager to open them up for mining, dams, industries, tourism, roads, and other so-called development projects, to the extent of being willing to even denotify them. Activists, conservationists, and community members have increasingly felt the need to respond to these conflicts, and to explore ways of working together to conserve wildlife, ensure local people's livelihoods, and challenge destructive industrial-commercial forces. Yet dialogue among us has been limited and sporadic. This meeting was an effort to initiate a more systematic process of dialogue and mutual understanding.

The meeting agreed on a number of principles, strategies and joint actions. For further information on these, you can either request it from us or contact directly Ashish Kothari, I.P. Estate, New Delhi 110002, Tel: 91-11-3317309; Fax: 91-11-3319954; Email: akothari@kv.unv.ernet.in

The final paragraph of the meeting's statement clearly establishes its approach to conservation:

"We resolve to work together towards ensuring the conservation of species and habitats, and the traditional rights of access to resources of local communities, for which our main struggle will be against the destructive industrial-commercial economy."

Source: Ashish Kothari, Indian Institute of Public Administration