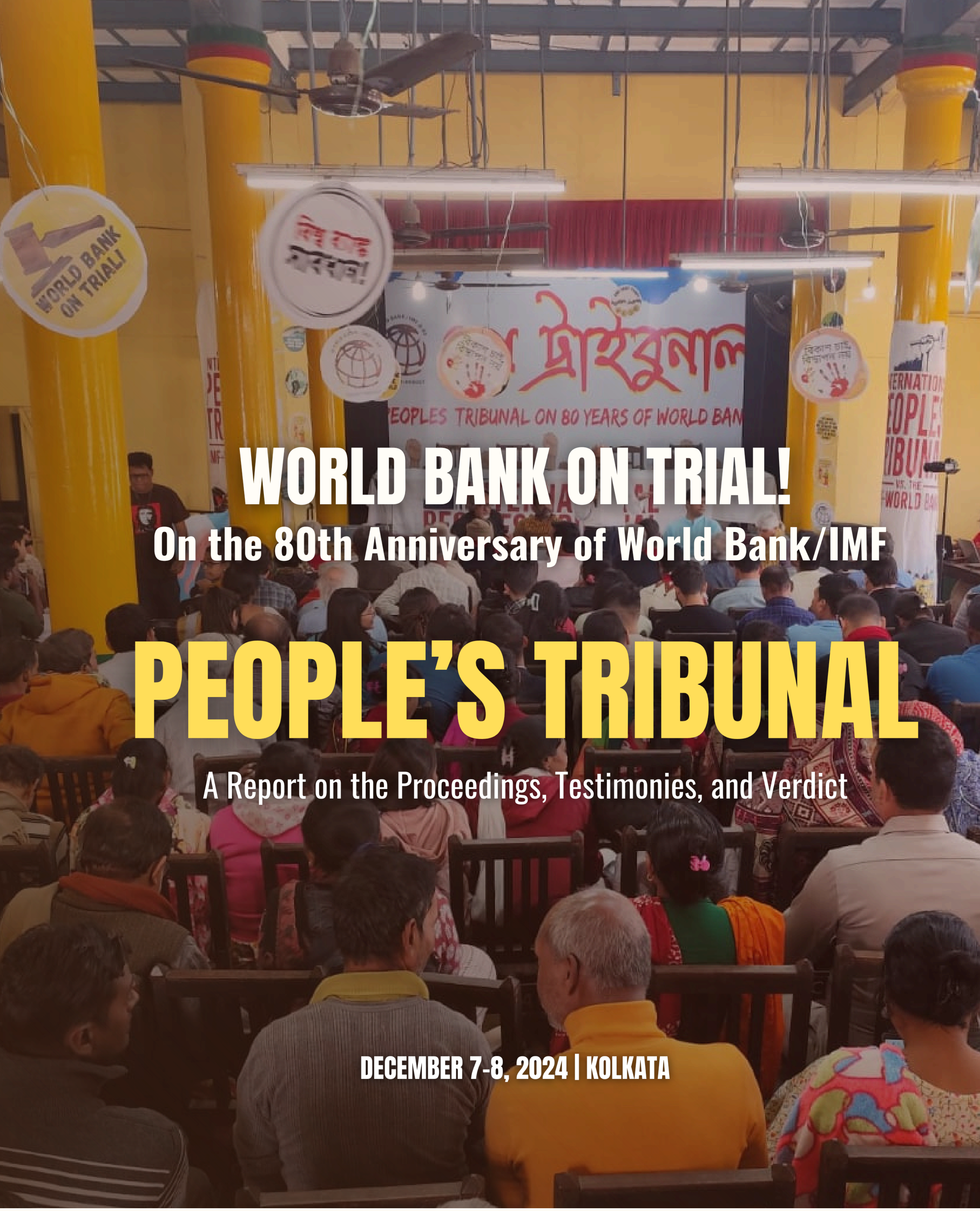

WORLD BANK ON TRIAL!

On the 80th Anniversary of World Bank/IMF

PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL

A Report on the Proceedings, Testimonies, and Verdict

DECEMBER 7-8, 2024 | KOLKATA

WORLD BANK / IMF @ 80

RESIST • REBOOT

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

ABD - Area-Based Development
ADB - Asian Development Bank
AIIB - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASA - Advisory Services and Analytics
CAO - Compliance Advisor Ombudsman
CGPL - Coastal Gujarat Power Limited
CIF - Climate Investment Funds
CRZ - Coastal Regulation Zone
DARPA - Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
DPL - Development Policy Loans
EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment
ENCORE - Enhancing Coastal and Ocean Resource Efficiency Programme
EoDB - Ease of Doing Business
FCPF- Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FPIC - Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GCF - Green Climate Fund
GLOF - Glacial Lake Outburst Flood
IPT - Independent People's Tribunal
IBRD - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICSID - International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
ICZM - Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IDA - International Development Association
IFC - International Finance Corporation
IIFCL - India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited
IMF - International Monetary Fund
IFI- International Financial Institutions
IPCC- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPP - Independent Power Producers
JNNURM- Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
LFPR - Labour Force Participation Rate
MASS - Machimar Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan
MIGA - Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
MMRDA - Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority
MSP - Minimum Support Price
MUTP - Mumbai Urban Transport Project
NBA - Narmada Bachao Andolan
NGT - National Green Tribunal
NIIF - National Investment and Infrastructure Fund
NTPC - National Thermal Power Corporation
PDS - Public Distribution System
PESA - Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas)
PPP - Public-Private Partnerships

PLI - Production Linked Incentives
PSU - Public Sector Undertaking
SAP - Structural Adjustment Programs
SEB - State Electricity Boards
STPP - Singrauli Thermal Power Plant
SPV - Special Purpose Vehicles
SSP - Sardar Sarovar Project
STARS - Strengthening Teaching Learning and Results for States Program
UBL- Urban Local Bodies
UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme
UN FCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UPI - Unified Payments Interface
WBG - World Bank Group

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale for the Tribunal

The Independent People's Tribunal (IPT) on the World Bank was convened in Kolkata, India, in December 2024, in response to the continued and pervasive influence of the World Bank on India's economic, social, and environmental landscape. Marking the 80th anniversary of the Bretton Woods Institutions, the tribunal sought to serve as a platform for civil society, local communities and experts to critically review its policies and interventions - policies that have, for decades, shaped national economies, influenced governance, and have had a socio-economic impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions, particularly in the Global South.

The rationale for such a tribunal arises from the need to assess the actual behaviour and performance of the World Bank in India based on credible evidence from the ground, establish accountability and develop a critique of the dominant narratives that frame the Bank and other international financial institutions as primarily being drivers of development in the country. Empirical evidence from India, show how the WBG has been instrumental in driving a neoliberal agenda that prioritises privatisation, deregulation, and corporate control over the rights of people and environment. While the institution has undergone rhetorical shifts in its approach over the years, its core economic strategies and prescriptions remain unchanged, perpetuating inequality and exclusion.

The IPT 2024 follows in the tradition of a previous People's Tribunal, held in India in 2007 on the 50th year anniversary of the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions to challenge and hold accountable the unchecked power of global financial institutions.[1] As India continues to be the World Bank's largest borrower, the need for such a tribunal remains as relevant as ever. The World Bank's influence in India extends beyond direct lending; shaping national policies, and promoting sectoral reforms in ways that systematically undermine democratic decision-making and public welfare.

The IPT in India is part of a broader global movement. Across the Global South, people's tribunals are being organised to examine and challenge the role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in perpetuating debt dependency, resource extraction, and corporate capture of essential services. With the first International People's Tribunal held in Manila in October 2024 and the third scheduled in Nepal in March 2025, the tribunal in India plays a crucial role by contributing critical evidence and testimonies to this global effort.

The IPT in India has been organised by the Working Group on International Financial Institutions, a collective of nearly 80 Indian organisations and individuals, to critically look at and evaluate the policies, programmes and financial interventions of various International Finance Institutions, with support from the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development, the National Hawkers Federation, Centre for Financial Accountability, Focus on Global South and Delhi Forum.

[1] https://www.worldbanktribunal.org/WB_Tribunal_Jury_Findings.pdf

In the lead-up to the IPT, five consultations were conducted between September and December 2024 to deliberate on and finalise its structure, modalities and planning.

Process and Its Modalities

The Independent People's Tribunal on the World Bank @ 80 was held over two days, on December 7 and 8, 2024, in Kolkata, India. The tribunal was structured as a people-led initiative to scrutinise the experience with World Bank projects and interventions in India and to critically assess and examine

their impact. Using a combination of testimonies and expert analyses, the IPT sought to provide an evidence-based review of the Bank's role in influencing and shaping India's political economy.

The IPT featured depositions from 30 speakers across five thematic sessions and was attended by over 300 participants from India and other countries. The tribunal adopted a structured approach to systematically document, analyse, and present evidence. Its key modalities included:

1. **Jury**: An expert and distinguished four-member jury that presided over the tribunal and heard testimonies from affected communities, civil society organisations, and researchers, to evaluate the social, economic, and environmental impacts of World Bank-funded projects.
2. **Witnesses**: Individuals or groups who provided first-hand evidence and data about the nature and consequences of World Bank projects, including displacement, environmental degradation, and economic distress.
3. **Prosecutors**: Individuals tasked with presenting and substantiating the case against the World Bank's interventions, drawing on testimonies, empirical research, and documented case studies.

The tribunal relied on a range of testimonies to build a well-documented analysis of the World Bank's impact. These testimonies were presented to the jury by:[2]

- Individuals and communities directly affected by World Bank-funded projects, sharing their lived experiences of displacement, loss of livelihoods, and ecological harm.

- Civil society organisations, subject experts, researchers, and academics, providing critical insights into the structural role of the World Bank in shaping India's economic and policy landscape over the years.

Representatives from the World Bank India had been invited to participate and present their defense but declined to attend.

[2] See list of speakers in Annexure

Executive Summary

The Independent People's Tribunal was structured to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the World Bank's activities in and their impact on India, with a particular focus on its evolving role over the last 20 years. The sessions were designed to document historical cases illustrating sectoral impacts, and interrogate governance and accountability mechanisms within the Bank's structure. The following five key sessions framed the tribunal's inquiry:

- The introductory session aimed to provide a background on the World Bank's role in India, its changing areas of intervention, and the critical issue of accountability and transparency in its operations. This session explored the historical evolution of the World Bank's presence in India, examining how it has combined roles of financial lender and policy influencer, leveraging its strategic power to dictate structural reforms. The discussion also covered legal immunity provisions that prevent affected communities from seeking redress and highlighted the lack of democratic oversight in World Bank-funded projects.

- The second session on Legacy Cases looked into the current status and long term consequences of landmark cases such as the Sardar Sarovar Dam, Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project, World Bank Social Forestry Programme, Mumbai Urban Transport Project, and Singrauli Thermal Power Plant. Testimonies from affected communities and activists illustrated how these projects displaced people, destroyed ecosystems, and reinforced inequitable economic models. The session also discussed the role of grassroots resistance in holding the World Bank accountable and demanding transparency in its operations.

- The third session on **Influence on Key Public Sectors** examined how World Bank interventions have reshaped critical public sector operations in India, including in agriculture, health, education, energy, water, urban planning, and banking. The session highlighted how corporate-friendly policies promoted by the World Bank have led to the erosion of public services, reduced access to essential goods, and worsened socio-economic inequalities. The session delved into how Bank-financed reforms have favoured corporate interests, resulting in increased privatisation, financialisation, and the dilution of public accountability mechanisms in essential services.

- The fourth session on Undermining the Public Sphere, People's Rights, and Democracy aimed to analyse the various mechanisms employed by the World Bank that have led to the weakening of labour protections, to environmental deregulation, and to the privatisation of public goods. This session detailed how the World Bank's push through creating knowledge banks and other policy frameworks have shaped decision-making in India, often prioritising corporate interests over labour rights and environmental protections. It also explored the increasing role of the World Bank in promoting digital surveillance, financialising natural resources, exacerbating gendered and class-based inequalities, and furthering caste and communal tensions through its interventions.

- The final session on the World Bank and the Climate Paradox examined the contradiction between the World Bank's climate commitment rhetoric and its continued financing of projects that exacerbate the climate crisis. This session aimed to highlight the gaps in the World Bank's climate finance mechanisms, revealing how investments are channelled towards large-scale energy and infrastructure projects that prioritise profit over climate justice. These projects have displaced communities and degraded ecosystems under the guise of climate action.

This report presents the jury's findings based on the evidence and testimonies submitted during the tribunal from affected people, experts and members of civil society. It outlines the jury's findings, conclusions, and recommendations for addressing the issues raised during the tribunal. The aim of the effort is to contribute to ongoing discussions on the role of the World Bank and other IFIs, advocating for greater accountability, fairer financial practices, and policies that prioritise social well-being and environmental health.

This report does not provide a chronological record of the testimonies and evidence presented during the tribunal. Instead, it seeks to synthesise the overall picture, drawing from discussions across sessions to highlight key themes, patterns, and systemic issues. The jury has used the presentations, testimonies, and expert analyses to construct a narrative that underscores the broader implications of the World Bank's interventions in India. Rather than documenting each testimony in sequence, the report aims to elucidate key findings and provide a structured analysis that reflects the tribunal's critical assessment.

The report contains the following chapters:

1. World Bank's Funding Patterns in India
2. The Direct Fallout of World Bank Projects
3. Shaping India's Political Economy
4. World Bank and the Climate Paradox
5. World Bank's Support to Authoritarian Regimes
6. Resistance and Advocacy
7. Concluding Reflections

CHAPTER 1

India and the World Bank Group

The World Bank Group (WBG)[3] is a consortium of international financial institutions that provide financial and technical assistance to governments and private entities with the overarching aim of reducing poverty, fostering shared prosperity, and promoting sustainable development. It defines itself as 'one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries.' Presently, the WBG comprises of 189 member countries including India. The WBG is composed of five distinct institutions:

- **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) -** Provides loans to middle-income and creditworthy low-income countries.
- **International Development Association (IDA) -** Offers concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest countries.
- **International Finance Corporation (IFC) -** Supports private sector development through investment and advisory services.
- **Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) -** Provides political risk insurance and credit enhancement to encourage foreign investment.
- **International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) -** Facilitates arbitration and dispute resolution between investors and states.

The WBG is owned and governed by the governments of its member countries, which hold decision-making authority over key matters such as policy, financial issues, and membership. To become a member of the World Bank, a country must first join the IMF. Membership in other World Bank institutions, including the IDA, IFC, and MIGA, is contingent upon being a member of the IBRD. India holds a voting share of 3.01% in the IBRD, 3.91% in the IFC, 2.91% in the IDA, and 2.53% in MIGA. However, the United States maintains the largest voting share across these institutions, exerting significant influence over their decision-making processes.[4]

Present Landscape of World Bank Engagement in India[5]

The WBG's lending framework supports both public and private sector investments through a variety of financial instruments tailored to the developmental needs of countries. Public sector investment projects receive funding across all types of sectors, ranging from hard infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and water systems to soft infrastructure, including education, healthcare, and governance reforms. In addition to project-specific loans, the WBG provides development policy loans, which are directed toward economic, institutional, and policy reforms rather than specific projects. These loans can significantly influence public spending priorities in a country, shaping fiscal policies and governance structures. They also help pave the way for greater private sector involvement, particularly in the management and reform of state-owned enterprises. In the private sector, the WBG extends loans to private companies and provides risk guarantees aimed at long-term economic growth.

[3] https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/home

[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/votingpowers

[5] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview

As of 2024, the World Bank's engagement in India includes 83 active lending operations, with total commitments amounting to $18.2 billion. The majority of these commitments amounting to $17.5 billion come from the IBRD, supplemented by additional support from the IDA. One-third of these projects support multi-state or central government operations, while the remainder are spread across 26 of India's 28 states. The largest funding commitments are in four key sectors: water ($2.5 billion), health ($2.5 billion), agriculture ($1.7 billion), and urban development ($1.3 billion).

Since 1958, the IFC has invested more than $32 billion in over 500 companies in India. India is IFC's largest client country, with over 250 projects and $8.9 billion in investments across infrastructure, energy, housing, technology, and finance. India accounts for more than 11% of IFC's global portfolio, and its investments in the country have nearly tripled in the last three years.

MIGA aims to enhance India's financial landscape by mobilising commercial investments through risk guarantees and currently has a gross exposure of $449.5 million in India. It has facilitated commercial financing for the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor and attracted international financiers for solar rooftop projects. It also actively evaluates opportunities to support Indian corporates' outbound investments.

The World Bank plays a central role as a global knowledge bank, shaping development discourse and influencing policy decisions through extensive research, publications, and advisory services. By publishing a vast array of books and reports on economic development, the Bank frames and influences debates on key development issues and policy choices. Many countries rely on the World Bank for insights into economic policies and development models.

As part of its 'Advisory Services and Analytics' (ASA), the WBG contributes to policy design, governance improvements, and the expansion of solutions to enhance state capacities. Its work spans macroeconomic analysis, financial sector reforms, public sector reforms, gender equity programmes, and environmental initiatives. At present, there are 18 ongoing analytical studies and 15 advisory projects in India. The Bank's advisory and technical services often act as a precursor to policy reforms and conditional lending, guiding governments in implementing structural changes.

Shifting Funding Trends in India

The World Bank has played a significant role in shaping India's economic trajectory through its funding patterns, particularly in the public sector and infrastructure development. Over the decades, the nature of World Bank funding has evolved in response to India's shifting policy landscape, transitioning from direct project funding to broader sectoral lending. This transformation aligns with neoliberal economic frameworks, obscuring specific project impacts while influencing national economic policies and governance structures. India has been a significant borrower from the World Bank since 1948, when it received its first funding for a railway project. Over time, the focus of lending expanded, aligning with India's economic policies and broader international development goals. Over the past 80 years of the World Bank's engagement in India, its lending patterns and policy influence can be broadly categorised into the following key phases:

- **Early Investments (1948–1970s):** Infrastructure and Agricultural Development: India's engagement with the World Bank began in 1948 with a $34 million loan for a railway project. In its early years, World Bank financing primarily supported infrastructure development, including railways, ports, power, and industrial finance. During the 1960s and 70s, the Bank's focus shifted towards agriculture, playing an important role in supporting the Green Revolution. This period saw increased investment in agricultural infrastructure, particularly irrigation systems and rural credit facilities.

- Expansion into Multi-Sectoral Lending (1980s–1990s): Economic Reforms and Structural Adjustments: The 1980s marked a diversification of World Bank investments beyond infrastructure and agriculture. Lending increased across multiple sectors from energy reforms to health, education, and urban development. However, the major shift occurred in the early 1990s when India undertook economic liberalisation under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were introduced, leading to fiscal and sectoral reforms. Key reforms included deregulation of industries, reduction in trade barriers, privatisation of public enterprises, and financial sector liberalisation.

- **Sectoral Reforms and Private Sector Participation (2000s–2010s):** During the 2000s, World Bank investments increasingly targeted state-level reforms in key areas such as energy, water, urban services, and governance. The Bank shifted its approach to supporting 'reform-oriented' states, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh. A key feature of this period was the emphasis on public-private partnerships (PPPs) and private sector participation. The IFC, the private-sector arm of the World Bank, expanded its role in financing large infrastructure projects, particularly in energy and transport. During this period, the World Bank started to focus on national programmes, including investments in primary education health, and nutrition. By the late 2000s, India had transitioned from being primarily an IDA recipient to a low-middle-income country with increased access to IBRD funding.

- **Contemporary Investments (2010s–Present): Policy-Based Lending and 'Finance-Plus' Approach:** In recent years, the World Bank has rebranded itself as a 'knowledge bank,' influencing policy through advisory services, research, and technical assistance. Its investment strategy now extends beyond direct project financing to policy-based lending, which ties loans to specific reforms. Development Policy Loans (DPLs) have been increasingly used to push for structural changes, such as labour market reforms, environmental deregulation, and financial sector modernisation.

From Loans to Leverage

The presentations and testimonies at the IPT in Kolkata highlighted the World Bank's failure to achieve its stated objectives. While the Bank's investment approach has evolved over time, the tribunal examined how it has used financial resources as leverage to shape economic landscapes. While its strategies have changed—from SAPs to DPLs, and advisory services—the core objective remains the same: to embed neoliberal economic policies that serve the interests of a few at the cost of the many.

- **Conditional Lending: From Structural Adjustment to New Structural Adjustments:** Structural Adjustment Programmes: Introduced in the 1980s and 1990s as conditions for financial assistance, forcing countries like India to adopt austerity measures, privatisation of public services, and deregulation which led to cuts in public spending, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalisation, and deregulation of safeguards. In India, SAPs were implemented during the 1991 economic crisis, restructuring the economy but deepening inequality and reducing state control over essential sectors.
    - ✦ Policies of the World Bank have resulted in several subsidies being cut for the poor.
    - ✦ Privatisation of essential public services like health and education was promoted.
    - ✦ The adoption of the Private Public Partnership models which transfer the risks to the public sector and profits to the private sector was aggressively pushed. PPPs have also led to reduced accountability.
- **Development Policy Loans:** While the WBG does not associate with SAPs any longer, this kind of conditional lending has continued through DPLs which are also tied to institutional and policy reform. These loans ensure that borrowing countries implement specific economic changes in exchange for funding. Today, nearly 50% of all borrowing from the World Bank comes in the form of DPLs, reinforcing its influence over national policy decisions.
    - ✦ A report by the World Bank mentions that diluting labour laws and relaxing environmental protections would improve India's Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) Rankings which has been used as an important tool for attracting investment.
    - ✦ Facing resistance to its energy projects, the World Bank introduced DPLs. By categorising energy as a sector within broader policy funding, the Bank avoids direct project financing while still influencing energy policies. However, the impact remains the same—violating rights, promoting privatisation, and reducing access for marginalised communities.
- **International Finance Corporation and the International Monetary Fund:** India's engagement with the IFC has grown significantly over the decades, making it the country with the highest IFC loan exposure and the largest user of its advisory services. However, the IFC's financing model prioritises financial sustainability over genuine developmental impact, which often promotes the interest of large multinational corporations. Instead of maximising social or economic benefits, IFC investments are primarily designed to minimise financial risk. To further safeguard corporate interests, the IFC has expanded its risk guarantees, ensuring that private investors bear minimal losses even if projects fail. IFC-funded projects in India have incurred a loss to date.
    - ✦ Borrowing from the Bank has been replaced by reliance on capital markets and the private sector, which prioritise investments that generate profitable returns.

- ✦ On many occasions the IMF has insisted that debts to private investors be paid in full before providing debt relief or prioritising the payment of private sector loans over government loans.
- ✦ Electricity reforms promoted by the World Bank have led to increased privatisation, raising the private sector's share in power generation from 8% in 2008 to 49% in 2023. The introduction of Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and the push for renewable energy through private sector participation have heightened concerns over affordability and accessibility.
- ✦ The IFC channels investments through financial intermediaries like the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) and India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL). This approach allows the World Bank to indirectly finance private projects while avoiding direct accountability for social and environmental impacts.

- **Crisis Driven Policy Interventions:** The World Bank has frequently used crises as an opportunity to introduce policy shifts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, financial assistance was linked to structural reforms under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package. These reforms were introduced at a time when India's economy was already under immense strain. Rather than offering unconditional support, the World Bank used the crisis as an opportunity to push long-term structural changes that prioritised corporate interests over public welfare.

- ✦ Deregulation of agricultural markets which led the Government to introduce the three farm laws.
- ✦ Deregulation of labour laws brought by the parliament which sought to weaken workers protections and rights.
- ✦ Increased privatisation in the health and social protection sectors. During this period there was a visible increase in the number of private sector health projects financed by the WBG, Asia Development Bank and other international financial institutions.
- ✦ The World Bank has pushed for reducing the costs of public education. A key recommendation has been on a possible need to rationalise the school network in some parts of the country. Picking up on this suggestion from NITI Aayog, India's Ministry of Education introduced the school rationalisation policy in 2021-22, which has led to the closure of tens of thousands of government schools across the country.

Development or Dependency? The Debt Trap

- According to the World Bank's International Debt Report 2024India's external debt has seen a significant rise over the past two decade, reaching $646.8 billion by the end of 2023, from $290.4 billion in 2010. A substantial 77% of this debt is long-term, while the remaining is short-term, making the country highly vulnerable to external financial pressures. Approximately one-third of India's external debt is owed to multilateral institutions, with the World Bank accounting for 11% of the total. The rising external debt raises concerns about financial sovereignty and dependency, as a significant portion of India's obligations are to foreign banks, governments, and private sector lenders. This scenario is not unique to India; many nations of the Global South face similar cycles of debt, often dictated by World Bank and IMF policies that shape national economies.

- The World Bank promotes itself as a key driver of development, yet its lending patterns have frequently resulted in debt traps for borrowing nations. While loans are intended to finance infrastructure and social programmes, they often come with rigid conditions that enforce structural adjustments, privatisation, and austerity measures which include the removal or cutting of subsidies. Instead of fostering economic independence, these conditions prioritise debt repayment over national welfare, leading to an erosion of sovereignty and deeper socio-economic inequalities.

- The World Bank-backed electricity restructuring in Odisha, led to privatisation and a sharp rise in tariffs, making electricity unaffordable for many. Similarly, in the water sector, privatisation efforts have weakened community rights, raising concerns about accessibility and affordability.

- The burden of debt and interest payments has led to significant cuts in welfare spending. Public health expenditure in India has plummeted from 8-14% in various states to just 3-4% today, largely due to the World Bank's policy influence. The shift towards private hospitals and insurance-based healthcare has widened inequality.

- In recent years, climate finance has become a new avenue for increasing external debt, particularly for developing nations. While the World Bank promotes itself as a champion of climate action, its climate finance initiatives often come in the form of loans rather than grants, further burdening already indebted nations.

- Infrastructure projects funded by World Bank loans (which add to the debt burden of countries) frequently displace vulnerable communities without adequate compensation. The Sardar Sarovar Dam project in India, for example, led to the displacement of 40,000 families, disproportionately affecting indigenous communities. Similarly, the Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project resulted in environmental degradation, water shortages, and loss of livelihoods for fisher workers.

- To manage debt and generate revenue, the World Bank advocates for asset recycling. It ws a model adopted in India as the National Monetization Pipeline which involved the sale of key public sector assets to private entities, often at massive losses, to raise capital to furnish debt.

Structural Inequality: Governance by the Few for the Few

- The WBG, despite branding itself as a multilateral development institution, operates under a governance structure that disproportionately serves the interests of its most powerful members. At its core lies a "one-dollar-one-vote" system, ensuring that wealthier nations, particularly the United States and its Global North allies, retain dominant control over global financial decision-making.

- The United States is the single largest shareholder across the five institutions of the WBG, wielding significant influence over its policies and funding priorities. The U.S. voting shares across these institutions are:
  - ✦ IBRD: 15.83%, IDA: 9.69%, IFC: 17.47% and MIGA: 14.81%

- While the U.S. holds the most significant influence, it is closely aligned with other Global North powers, particularly the G7 nations, which together control a majority share of votes across all World Bank institutions. This means that the Bank's priorities, policies, and lending conditions are crafted to align with the economic and geopolitical interests of the wealthiest nations. Despite its claims of poverty alleviation and global development, the World Bank operates fundamentally as an instrument of financial and geopolitical influence for the Global North, shaping policies that serve its most powerful stakeholders while keeping borrowing nations in cycles of debt and dependency.

- Despite being fully aware of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on developing nations, the World Bank continues to repackage and rebrand the same destructive policies under the guise of "green finance" and "climate solutions." These measures are not aimed at real climate justice but rather at maintaining control over global financial flows while ensuring profits for the same corporations that caused the crisis.

- The climate crisis has increased inequality among vulnerable nations like India, yet the World Bank's solutions fail to address these realities. Instead of supporting grants and equity-based financing, it is promoting concessional loans instead of offering real financial support while transferring the burden of climate action to poorer Global South countries.

- The World Bank's financial policies and strategic partnerships strongly align with the geopolitical and economic interests of the Global North. Its largest shareholders have actively directed financial flows toward countries that serve their strategic objectives which has included supporting authoritarian and politically repressive regimes over principles of democratic accountability, social justice and human rights.

The findings from the IPT reveal that the WBG operates far beyond the role of a financial lender; it has strategically leveraged its funding to shape India's economic, social, and political landscape. Through its lending instruments, policy advisories, and technical assistance, the Bank has embedded neoliberal economic and governance frameworks that prioritise privatisation, deregulation, and fiscal restructuring. While it presents itself as a development partner, its interventions have systematically influenced national policies, often aligning them with global financial interests rather than domestic priorities.

From SAPs to development policy loans, the Bank has ensured that financial assistance comes with conditions that restructure key sectors, diminish state control, and expand private sector influence. Its push for public-private partnerships, privatisation of essential services, and financialisation of development has often resulted in widening inequality, weakened public institutions, and increased corporate dominance over critical public sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure.

Moreover, its governance structure is dominated by the Global North which ensures that economic policies serve the interests of its largest shareholders. By tying loans to specific policy reforms and crisis-driven interventions, the World Bank has exercised significant influence over India's developmental trajectory that reinforce financial dependency.

CHAPTER 2

The Direct Fallout of World Bank Projects

The World Bank's stated mission to alleviate poverty and support sustainable development often stands in contrast to the actual consequences of its projects, especially in countries like India. Numerous interventions by the World Bank have had direct and severe negative consequences on local communities, ecosystems, and economies. Far from achieving equitable growth, these projects have repeatedly resulted in significant displacement of populations, widespread environmental degradation, and the undermining of traditional livelihoods and local economic structures.

Moreover the ideological framework of 'development' advocated by the World Bank often exacerbates existing inequalities rather than reducing them. The Bank's approach tends to prioritise macroeconomic indicators and large-scale infrastructure projects, frequently neglecting the nuanced social and ecological dynamics that are vital for genuine sustainability. Evidence and testimonies presented at the IPT underscore the substantial gap between the World Bank's rhetoric about equitable and sustainable growth and the lived realities experienced by affected communities. These testimonies clearly demonstrate a pattern where promises of shared prosperity and environmental responsibility remain largely unfulfilled, calling into question the fundamental alignment between the World Bank's stated objectives and its actual impact on the ground.

Impacts on the Environment

The World Bank portrays itself as a Knowledge Bank advising on environment, social impacts, economic policies, and so on. However, the Bank's ideological push reshapes global governance to serve elite interests, fostering inequity, environmental degradation, and social exclusion while eroding democratic safeguards. The WBG's policies have failed to deal with the global environmental, climate and biodiversity crisis. It has also eroded environmental laws globally, including in India, under the guise of facilitating EoDB. Furthermore, in the name of renewable energy, the World Bank has been selling technologies, processes and policies, which has often led to large scale displacement and impoverishment, unequal access to energy, prioritising the urban consumer and pushing for private control and profit.

- The Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the Narmada River was one of India's most controversial infrastructure projects. Located in Gujarat, the project was conceived as part of a larger multi-dam initiative across the Narmada basin, spanning Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. The World Bank approved funding for the project in 1985, committing approximately $450million towards its construction. The project was envisioned to provide irrigation benefits to nearly 1.8 million hectares of land and generate 1,450 MW of hydroelectric power. However, its implementation had significant environmental consequences, and many of its promised benefits never materialised. The project had significant negative environmental impacts, including large-scale displacement of communities, widespread flooding of fertile land, disruption of downstream ecosystems, waterlogging, salinisation, deforestation, and a detrimental impact on local biodiversity due to the submergence of natural habitats. Furthermore, the environmental impact assessment conducted before the project was undertaken was inadequate and did not sufficiently account for its potentially negative environmental impacts.

- The decline in fish populations has been devastating for the fishing communities in the region. Fish catch has been reduced by 70-80%, significantly affecting the incomes of local fisherfolk who rely on marine life for their sustenance. Many families have been forced to seek alternative employment, leading to economic distress and food insecurity.

- The environmental impact of the project has been equally alarming. The heated water discharged from the plant has disrupted marine ecosystems, affecting migratory fish species essential to both local biodiversity and the fishing industry. Water contamination from coal ash and other pollutants has degraded water quality, making it unsuitable for fishing and household consumption. Increased salinisation of land and water sources has also negatively affected agriculture in the region, with farmers reporting declining crop yields and loss of fertile soil.

- Health issues have also been a growing concern. Increased air pollution from coal emissions has led to higher instances of respiratory illnesses among local residents. The long-term exposure to pollutants has particularly affected children and the elderly, exacerbating pre-existing health vulnerabilities. Climate change-induced extreme weather events, such as cyclones, have further compounded the difficulties faced by communities, increasing displacement and damage to homes and livelihoods

- The World Bank has played a crucial role in financing and providing an ideological direction to governments to cater to the interests of business. It has also influenced climate-related law making in India too.

- EoDB has emerged as a grand narrative produced by the policy push of the World Bank which has has come up with a ranking system on it. One of the reports of the World Bank maintains that if India dilutes its labour laws and environmental protection legislation, its ranking on EoDB indicators will go up! In 2014, expansion projects in the coal mining sector environmental clearances were amended to exempt them from public hearing in the case of expansion of a project under a certain volume. Public hearing involves consultation with the gram sabha. Furthermore, the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) or PESA act was also diluted. After this a project could go ahead even at the 'in principle' approval stage. The environmental clearance validity has now been extended to 10 years, despite vast and rapid changes in technology. Similar changes have been brought in coastal regulation to open hitherto closed areas of coast for development which, in turn, adversely affect the ecology and welfare of the fishing community.

- Even the definition of forest has been changed and artificial forests and plantations can now be considered as forests, even as many real natural dense forest areas are now been opened for mining operations and general exploitation. This has led to a lot of greenwashing. Shrub lands and grass lands, with their own distinct ecosystems, are sites of biodiversity. They have now been categorised as wastelands. Wastelands are then opened for plantations and carbon credit schemes, often killing the ecosystems which existed there.

- Solar and hydro projects are exempted from environmental laws in the name of renewable energy. And in the name of just transitioning from fossil fuel-based energy, solar and hydropower are being promoted in common lands, displacing several pastoral communities and significantly impacting the environment and its biodiversity.

- The carbon markets were started by the World Bank to essentially monetise forest resources which severely impacted the environment and the people safeguarding it. This programme is continuing in many states in India demolishing forests and farm lands. Monoculture plantations, which destroy forests and the environment, are wrongly classified as carbon sinks and monetised under the carbon market mechanism of the World Bank. Furthermore, the World Bank has also proposed "biodiversity offsets", where biodiversity can be destroyed from one area and replaced in another area. The World Bank has itself subsequently admitted that this policy, with its sinister design, was a mistake.

Displacement and Rehabilitation

Displacement due to large-scale development projects has been one of the most devastating consequences of economic policies driven by institutions like the World Bank. The forced eviction of communities, often under the guise of infrastructure and progress, disproportionately impacts indigenous groups, small farmers, and the urban poor populations who have little political voice. The resettlement process, when undertaken, is riddled with systemic neglect, inadequate compensation, and cultural erosion. The forced displacement of communities leads to the destruction of traditional livelihoods, social networks, and cultural identities, leaving affected populations in a permanent state of marginalisation.

- **Inadequate Compensation:** Despite policy frameworks that claim to provide fair compensation and rehabilitation, the reality is vastly different. Compensation is often meagre and fails to account for long-term economic disruption.
    - The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a case in point. Over 200,000 people, mostly farmers, fishers, and indigenous communities, were displaced. The rehabilitation process was marred by delayed payments, inadequate land-for-land provisions, and resettlement sites that lacked essential
    - services. Protests led by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) forced the World Bank to withdraw funding, yet thousands remain without viable livelihoods.

> **The first impact of colonialism was on forests. Today we have a neo-colonialism which is destroying our forests.**
>
> **- Roma Malik**
> *General Secretary of the All India Union for Forest Working People on the Social Forestry Programme.*

- ✦ The Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project is another example of inadequate compensation. The World Bank-backed project altered the local coastal environment, leading to a drastic decline in fish populations. Many fisherfolk lost their primary source of income and were not adequately compensated. Additionally, the environmental reports downplayed the project's adverse impact.
- ✦ The World Bank Social Forestry Programme, rather than improving livelihoods, displaced indigenous and forest-dependent communities by restricting access to forests. Compensation mechanisms failed to restore their traditional way of life, leaving many in economic distress.
- ✦ The Teesta Hydropower Project in Sikkim led to the loss of land and cultural heritage for local communities. Despite years of protests and legal battles, compensation and rehabilitation efforts have remained inadequate, with thousands of people still waiting for the promised support.

> **Our rights are not recognised in law. Traditional customary rights over land, water, and forests must be recognised and emphasised repeatedly.**
>
> - **Jesurathinam Christy**
> *National Fishworkers' Forum*

- Cultural Erosion and Loss of Social Identity: Displacement is not just an economic or logistical challenge; it deeply impacts the social and cultural fabric of communities. Forced relocations sever traditional knowledge systems, disrupt social structures, and dilute indigenous cultures.
  - ✦ In Singrauli, displacement has changed the very nature of social life. The Baiga tribal community, historically dependent on forests for sustenance, saw their way of life dismantled. The culture of shared labour and traditional ecological knowledge has been lost, replaced by precarious labour in coal mines. The impacts have extended to psychological distress, with rising cases of depression, substance abuse, and crime.

Livelihood impacts of World Bank Projects

One of the most tragic outcomes of the World Bank investments in "development" projects has been the massive displacement of local people, a population that is disproportionately composed of indigenous and low income groups with little political voice. This has led to the loss of livelihoods by uprooting them socially and economically. Displacement and loss of livelihoods seems to be the common denominator in all the World Bank projects in India such as the Sardar Sarovar dam, Singrauli coal plant investments, Mumbai Urban Transport Project (MUTP), the Green Revolution, etc, yet there has been no transparency or accountability in any of the processes.

- Over a period of a decade, the MUTP displaced approximately 400,000 people, far exceeding the initial estimate of 100,000. Resistance emerged from affected communities due to inadequate compensation, lack of proper consultation, and poor rehabilitation policies. Many households deemed ineligible for rehabilitation were left without any compensation despite losing their homes. After a complaint was filed with the Inspection Panel, but the inquiry failed to ensure meaningful redressal for affected communities despite finding that the project failed to meet its R&R commitments and violated its own policies.

- The project disproportionately affected low-income and marginalised communities, forcing them into resettlement areas with inadequate civic infrastructure. Many displaced households lacked access to essential services such as water, sanitation, education, and healthcare. The relocation process resulted in economic distress.

- The resettlement sites were disconnected from economic hubs, making it nearly impossible for the displaced to sustain their previous livelihoods and nearly 54% of those rehabilitated were unable to continue their previous occupations, with women being the most affected. The Social Impact Assessment which was meant to improve lives failed to provide adequate provisions for employment and economic integration.

> **Although MMRDA didn't profit directly, the real winners were the developers and builders who used Transferable Development Rights in prime locations to maximize their gains. This process benefitted many —but at a cost. The poor were ghettoized, pushed to the periphery into low land value areas, which again served the interests of developers. Most women lost their livelihoods, and to this day, many residents are still struggling to get their entitlement documents transferred.**
>
> **- Shweta Damble**
> *on the Mumbai Urban Transport Project*

- The World Bank initially planned to fund the Amaravati Development project but later withdrew due to protests and controversies. There was massive land-grabbing of the fertile land in the garb of voluntary land-pooling and livelihood impacts of the displaced people. However, in December 2024, the World Bank Board of Directors approved $800 million for the Amaravati Capital City project, despite the Bank's own Inspection Panel calling for investigations into it earlier. The Andhra Pradesh High Court termed the Land Pooling Scheme prima facie illegal and in non-compliance of the National Green Tribunal's orders. In 2017, local communities impacted by the project raised their concerns with the World Bank's Inspection Panel (IPN), which submitted its Third Report and Recommendation in March 2019. The Panel's findings highlighted significant issues with the project, particularly regarding the violation of the Bank's Involuntary Resettlement Policy. These issues, including inadequate compensation, lack of livelihood restoration, and the absence of necessary consultations, remain unresolved to this day.

- Due to the policies of the World Bank-IMF, 10 lakh farmers have been rendered landless and 1 lakh have been forced to commit suicide. This is only an official number, the real figure is much higher as the official data does not count tenant farmers, Adivasi, Dalit farmers and women farmers. The irony is that these anti- people policies have been introduced and pushed with claims of eradicating poverty and inequality. In the name of free trade and deregulation, protective policies and subsidies for farmers have been removed impacting their livelihoods severely.

- The urban development model prescribed by the World Bank has affected the street vendors the most. In 2014, the Street Vendor's Act came into effect. Even though street vending is the highest job creating sector in urban areas, it sought was sought to be destroyed by the model of urban infra centric development laid out by the World Bank. The impact of this is that the land cost in urban areas has skyrocketed and commercial exploitation has increased. The livelihood of street vendors have impacted severely and in many cases has died out.

- The NBA primarily impacted the livelihoods of local communities in the Narmada Valley by causing large-scale displacement due to dam construction, leading to significant loss of land, traditional farming practices, and access to natural resources, often leaving affected people with inadequate compensation and resettlement options, severely disrupting their primary sources of income and way of life; this displacement disproportionately affected indigenous and tribal populations who relied heavily on the river ecosystem for sustenance.

- The people of Singrauli have been displaced from their land and homes since the 1950s due to dams, power plants, and mining projects. An environmental assessment commissioned by the World Bank and NTPC in 1991 found that 90 per cent of the local people had been displaced at least once, and 34 per cent had been forced to move multiple times. The same study found that resettlement "appears to have failed in practically all cases", and noted in particular "the inadequacy of facilities and equipment necessary for water, sewage treatment, schools, education and medical care." Today, Singrauli stands as a classic example of how the negative effects of World Bank investments last over generations, often causing unforeseen, overlooked, or ignored impacts that continue long beyond the period of investment.

- The dense forests that once covered the area have been cleared, and the land has been handed over to large corporations, including those like Adani. Villages like Vindhyachal have seen widespread displacement and dispossession, forcing thousands into poverty. Farmers who once thrived on fertile land have been left with no sustainable livelihood.

- The World Bank Social Forestry Programme, which was meant to restore degraded land and assist affected communities, only facilitated the extraction of forest resources, further displacing indigenous communities. In projects like Rajaji National Park, the World Bank's involvement led to large-scale evictions of forest-dwelling communities under the guise of conservation, disregarding their traditional rights.

Inequality

The World Bank, positioned globally as an institution dedicated to reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development, paradoxically has often been a significant contributor to deepening inequality. Its interventions, primarily through structural adjustment policies and privatisation efforts in critical sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and infrastructure, have disproportionately favoured private interests, often undermining public welfare and widening socioeconomic gaps.

- The World Bank's ideological approach, camouflaged under the appealing banner of economic development, frequently prioritises private sector profits over public welfare. Privatisation has been aggressively championed by the World Bank, particularly in essential sectors like health and education. The neoliberal reforms introduced in the early 1990s under SAPs, advocated by the World Bank and IMF, laid the groundwork for privatisation and deregulation in India, severely affecting critical sectors such as agriculture, health, and education.

- Privatisation models like PPPs, have shifted essential public services into profit-driven models, disproportionately disadvantaging poor and marginalised communities who find private services like healthcare or education financially inaccessible

- The privatisation push is further exemplified in Kerala, where major hospitals are now partially owned by international hedge funds such as Blackstone, primarily interested in high-profit margins. This dynamic underscores the broader issue: the World Bank's role has evolved from simply providing loans to acting as a facilitator for private capital's entry into public sectors, thus prioritising profits over public good. The example of Blackstone investing in Kerala's hospitals illustrates how essential healthcare services are being commodified for exorbitant private gains, fundamentally compromising public health objectives.

- In the realm of education, World Bank-funded programmes like Strengthening Teaching Learning and Results for States Program (STARS) have similarly fostered privatisation, diluting commitments to universally accessible education. Despite India's Right to Education Act promising equitable and inclusive education, public schools have seen deliberate neglect under World Bank advisories, paving the way for an increasingly privatised education system that disproportionately impacts the underprivileged.

- Further exacerbating these inequalities is the World Bank's approach to debt management. Despite advocating for debt reduction, the World Bank's policies have paradoxically induced debt distress through austerity measures in developing countries. Such policies reflect an underlying bias towards safeguarding private capital interests at severe costs to public welfare and fiscal stability.

- The doctrine of trickle-down economics advocated by the World Bank has proven to be a failure, evident from India's growing billionaire class juxtaposed against the country's declining ranking in the global hunger index and rising malnutrition and anaemia rates among its children.

CHAPTER 3

Shaping India's Political Economy

The World Bank's deepening intrusion in India's political economy reflects the broader realities of the global economic order, marked by a system of global financial governance that perpetuates inequality. While the Bank claims to support poverty reduction and development, its interventions which are shaped by neoliberal doctrines, have quietly shifted India's development path towards greater reliance on global finance capital and a model of development that is rooted in the colonial logic of exploitation, prioritising capital over communities and markets over meaningful social transformation. Far from neutral financial assistance, World Bank policies represent an ideological and economic imposition that systematically dismantles state capacities, promotes deregulation, and prioritises private accumulation over collective welfare.

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> **"The government has changed their laws and regulations to accommodate to World Bank/IMF policies and interventions"**
>
> **- Shalmali Guttal**
> Focus on Global South

Trade, Industry and Macro Policy [6]

The economic reforms initiated in India in 1991 were not only the product of domestic deliberation but were deeply shaped and influenced by international financial institutions. The IMF and the World Bank argued that India's economic crisis was a result of three factors, an excessive presence of the state in economic activity, a high fiscal deficit caused by public spending, and a lack of liberalising reforms that were said to constrain export growth. As a result of the foreign exchange reserve collapse prompting conditional borrowing, these institutions prescribed a package of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies that fundamentally reshaped India's trade and industrial planning. This shift entrenched a neoliberal framework that prioritised fiscal austerity, liberalised trade and capital flows, and subordinated domestic industry to the logic of global capital. While couched in the language of growth and competitiveness, these reforms brought in a deflationary regime that hollowed out India's industrial base, increased dependence on foreign capital, and restructured the role of the state in ways that continue to the present day.

[6] The Market That Failed: Neoliberal Economic Reforms in India, C. P. Chansekhar and Jayati Ghosh

- Fiscal Austerity and Subsidy Cuts: As part of the IMF-World Bank stabilisation programme, the Indian government was required to sharply reduce its fiscal deficit from 8.3% of GDP in 1990-91 to 3-4%. To meet this target, the government cut subsidies, especially those for food and fertilizers, and drastically curtailed capital expenditure. This reduced government investment in infrastructure and social sectors, directly impacting growth and employment. While framed as a short-term corrective measure, this austerity-driven approach has become institutionalised over time leading to cutting down of revenue expenditure on welfare. Budgets for critical for welfare programmes such as education, health, nutrition and rural development have seen a steady decline or a stagnation of their allocations. Decline in spending on social welfare in turn exacerbates inequality and intensifies social polarisation.

- Trade Liberalisation: The World Bank and IMF pushed for removal of quantitative import restrictions and drastic tariff reductions. Capital goods and intermediates were especially liberalised, promoting imports and allowing foreign companies easy access to Indian markets. The liberalisation of trade policy was justified as a way to improve efficiency and global competitiveness, but it also exposed domestic industries, especially those in the agriculture and small-scale and labour-intensive sectors, to global competition without adequate support. Despite successive policy interventions made by the Government, share of domestic manufacturing in GDP has not improved.

- De-licensing, Deregulation, and Favouring Private & Foreign Investment: Privileging Foreign Investment: Post-1991, India dismantled the industrial licensing regime thus allowing private and foreign players to freely enter most sectors, with licensing retained only for a few strategic areas. Public sector monopolies were broken up, PSUs were disinvested, and key industries such as telecom, aviation, insurance, and power, were opened up to private capital. The push continues today through disinvestment drives, privatisation of public infrastructure (including railways, airports, ports and electricity distribution), and the introduction of production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes aimed at attracting global corporations. These measures not only indicate the retreat of the state from productive sectors but actively reshape policy and regulatory frameworks to favour large private actors.

- The Indian state has actively reshaped laws to favour corporates which has been pushed through the World Bank's EoDB framework which has created an incentive for governments to undertake deregulatory reforms in order to attract investment at the cost of subverting democratic processes or compromising public safeguards. As a result many labour and environmental regulations have been dismantled.
- Labour laws have been consolidated into four new labour codes that dilute workers' rights to unionise, ease restrictions on hiring and firing, and weaken mechanisms for wage security and social protection. These changes reduce compliance burdens for businesses but come at the cost of job security, collective bargaining, and workplace safety.
- Environmental safeguards have been similarly eroded. The environment clearance process as well as protections have been weakened with a series of legislative and policy changes. The Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2023 and the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019 are key examples, both of which dilute protections for ecologically sensitive areas. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification has been amended multiple times to expedite project approvals, often at the cost of public consultation and environmental scrutiny. Similarly, CRZ norms have been relaxed to permit real estate and industrial development in fragile coastal zones, undermining long-standing ecological protections.
- Since liberalisation, the corporate sector has benefited from significant tax concessions, while the burden of indirect taxes has steadily shifted on to ordinary citizens and smaller businesses. In 2019, the Indian Government reduced the base corporate tax rate from 30% to 22%.

Impact on Various Sectors

The WBG has played a critical role in shaping and influencing key sectors in India which have led to sector specific reforms in agriculture, urban development, energy, education, and health. The role of the World Bank extends beyond merely providing financial support to actively driving policy design and institutional restructuring. In doing so, it has shaped outcomes that have frequently undermined public interest: exacerbating inequality, weakening public institutions, displacing communities, and compromising access to essential services like education, healthcare, and food. The emphasis on PPPs and privatisation has led to the dilution of the welfare obligations and accountability of the Indian state.

> **All protective tariffs for Indian farmers were removed. As the old saying goes: 'The Indian farmer is born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt**
>
> **- Vijoo Krishnan**
> Secretary, All India Kisan Sabha

- **Agriculture and the Right to Food:** The policies promoted by the World Bank and IMF have had a devastating impact on Indian agriculture and the right to food.
  - Due to policies pushed by the World Bank and IMF, over 10 lakh farmers have been rendered landless and more than 1 lakh have taken their own lives. These figures grossly under-represent the actual scale of the crisis as they exclude tenant farmers, Dalit and Adivasi cultivators, and women farmers, many of whom remain invisible in government statistics.

- Indian farmers are born in debt, live in debt, and die in debt. SAPs and subsequent lending conditions have led to the dismantling of protective policies and agricultural subsidies that once shielded farmers from the volatility of the global market. Under the banner of "free trade" and deregulation, the Indian government guided by World Bank-backed policies has gradually withdrawn state support in critical areas such as irrigation, electricity, and price support, leaving farmers to bear rising input costs alone. Conditional loans have further increased debt dependency of farmers, while high user charges for basic resources like water and power add to their financial burden.
- The now-repealed farm laws of 2020 represent the most explicit manifestation of this trajectory. Marketed as pro-farmer reforms that would allow cultivators to “earn in dollars,” they were in fact designed to deregulate procurement and eliminate the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system which would have in effect enabled the handing over of the agriculture sector to corporate control. The World Bank has long advocated for such reforms, praising deregulation in its EoDB rankings and agricultural sector assessments.
- These reforms not only threaten the livelihoods of farmers but also jeopardise the food security of the poor. The weakening of procurement systems and public food distribution undermines the National Food Security Act and the Public Distribution System (PDS) which serves as a lifeline for crores of Indians.
- The World Bank has also backed controversial programmes such as the large-scale fortification of rice through the PDS. While presented as a nutritional intervention, the fortification programme has raised serious public health concerns. Independent fact-finding missions in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have documented adverse health impacts among communities consuming fortified rice. Despite mounting criticism from public health experts and even government advisors, the Indian government has continued to push this policy backed by World Bank funding and technical support. Such interventions ignore local food systems and undermine community-based solutions to nutrition.
- When citizens demand accountability, they are often met with state repression. This increasing authoritarianism mirrors a broader global trend where the World Bank has historically supported authoritarian regimes so long as they implement market-friendly reforms.

- **Health and Education:** Both health and education in India have followed a similar trajectory under World Bank-led reforms. Once seen as essential public goods, both sectors have been restructured to favour market-based models. This shift has deepened inequality, excluded the most vulnerable, and weakened the state’s role in ensuring universal access.

  - World Bank has been a key policy influencer in the health sector in India. The initial offering of grants for disease control, quickly transitioned into providing loans with strong conditionalities. Alongside USAID, CIDA, and other bilateral donors, the Bank has played a central role in shaping the direction of health policy in India through money and influence. The nature of this influence has steadily shifted the discourse from health as a public good to health as a market commodity.
  - Before World Bank interventions, several Indian states allocated between 8% to 14% of their budgets to health. Today, that figure has dropped to just 3-4%, even in states like Kerala that once led in public health indicators. The reforms introduced under the Bank’s guidance, particularly under the PPP models, have reduced the credibility of the public health system, diverted resources to private actors, and made access more unequal. Major government health programmes, especially in rural and tribal areas, are now run through PPPs which leave

the poor and vulnerable dependent on hospitals they find unwelcoming, unaffordable, or inaccessible.

- ✦ Similar patterns can be seen in the education sector. Since the 1990s, the World Bank has been a key player in the push toward education “reforms,” which have largely meant the gradual privatisation of schooling in India. These reforms were introduced under the larger liberalisation project and implemented in collaboration with the Indian government. While marketed as improvements in quality and access, they have instead led to the neglect of government schools and the promotion of private, often unregulated, educational institutions. Between 2014-15 and 2023-24, close to 90,000 government schools have been closed while the number for private schools has increased by nearly 42,000. School curriculums have been recast in the name of improving educational outcomes, leading to the promotion of anti-minority, ideologically driven education.
- ✦ The World Bank-funded STARS programme, implemented in states like Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, received over ₹3 billion in investment. However, it has failed to address core issues like poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and improved access for marginalised children. Instead, it prioritises metrics, standardised testing, and digital tools that overlook ground realities and reduce education to a bureaucratic exercise.

- **Urban Development:** The World Bank exerts significant influence on how Indian cities are imagined, governed and financed.
  - ✦ Urban reform began with the SAPs at the national level but soon extended to urban local bodies (ULBs) and panchayati raj institutions. With the launch of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in 2005, heavily influenced and funded by the World Bank, urban governance in India took a decisive turn. A $1 billion loan was channelled through the Union Ministry of Urban Development to initiate "reforms" which, in effect, meant the large-scale privatisation and outsourcing of municipal services over the following decades.
  - ✦ ULBs were instructed to move away from public service delivery and instead act as facilitators for private players. User charges for basic services like water, sanitation, and waste management were introduced, making essential services more expensive and inaccessible for the urban poor. At the same time, cities were redefined not as places to live with dignity, but as "growth engines" and "investment destinations", a framing that has shifted urban planning priorities away from the needs of the people who occupy cities.
  - ✦ Since 2009, urban infrastructure such as highways, flyovers, and smart cities has been the primary focus of development, often at the cost of core public services. Land has become a key asset in this model, leading to skyrocketing of real estate prices, increased land acquisition, and displacement. Urban infrastructure companies have emerged with quasi-governmental powers, often enjoying rights over public land in violation of constitutional principles. Area-Based Development (ABD) schemes under smart cities have further sidelined elected local bodies, replacing them with corporate-style Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) that operate without democratic accountability. Under this policy influence, local bodies have been disempowered, public spaces have been commercialised, and essential services have been commodified.

- Projects like the Jal Jeevan Mission reflect this trend. Although framed as a universal service delivery programme, it is funded through loans raised jointly by the Union and state governments, many of which are tied to World Bank or multilateral financing. The programme was launched hastily to facilitate private investment and lacks long-term sustainability or local ownership.
- Street vendors and other informal sector workers—who are among the most vital contributors to the urban economy—are increasingly being pushed to the margins. Despite the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, their rights are routinely ignored, and the law remains poorly implemented. Urban planning frameworks systematically exclude these workers, viewing their presence as a hindrance to urban beautification projects and infrastructure development. As a result, those who occupy, use, and shape the city through their everyday labour are rendered invisible and displaced in favour of privatised, capital-intensive forces of urban growth.

- **Energy and Mining:** Whether through coal, hydropower, or mining, the World Bank's interventions in India's energy sector have privileged profit over people and policy over participation. By shaping laws, bypassing consent, and pushing extractive projects into ecologically and socially fragile zones, the Bank has undermined both democratic rights and environmental justice.
  - The World Bank used the 1991 economic reforms to step into the power sector. As part of India's liberalisation programme, the World Bank advocated for deregulation and privatisation across sectors, including power. It recommended unbundling the power sector (generation, transmission, distribution) and promoting private sector participation. Distribution, the most lucrative segment, was handed over to private companies, with full freedom to determine pricing.
  - The Bank began supporting state-specific reforms and in 1996, Odisha became the first Indian state to implement comprehensive unbundling and privatisation of distribution under World Bank guidance and funding. This became a model for other states like Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
  - With World Bank's backing, this central government programme aimed to improve the financial health of State Electricity Boards (SEBs) and encourage restructuring which eventually led to the unbundling of SEBs and the push for tariff rationalisation and private investment.
  - When faced with resistance, the World Bank started a new financing instrument through DPLs which promoted the same agenda. These loans did not fund specific infrastructure but supported state-level policy reforms, which included energy privatisation agendas without public scrutiny or environmental oversight.
  - In Himachal Pradesh, the World Bank avoided direct project finance but shaped energy governance through policy-level engagement in the name of "clean and green" power. In practice, this meant promoting private hydropower developers, disregarding local consent, and endangering fragile ecosystems.
  - In Mundra and Singrauli, two coal-based power plants financed by the WBG were approved despite violating the Bank's own safeguard policies. These projects have resulted in devastating health impacts and severe economic consequences for the affected communities.

> **15,000 people have been robbed of their land; illnesses dog them; cultural and morality norms are disintegrating, we are witnessing mini Hiroshimas...**
>
> **- Awadesh Kumar**
> *on the Singrauli Thermal Power Plants*

- **Gender:** The World Bank positions itself as a global leader on gender equity. Its policy documents like the 2024–2030 Gender Strategy are filled with the language of empowerment, inclusion, and advocacy on closing gender gaps. It would appear that no institution speaks more about gender than the World Bank! But a closer look reveals a deeply limited understanding of gender justice which fails to address the root causes of women's oppression and offers technocratic, patchwork solutions instead of structural change.
  - The labour force participation rate (LFPR) among women remains significantly lower than that of men. While rural female LFPR has fluctuated over the years, the post-COVID increase reflects not empowerment but economic compulsion—women entering the workforce out of necessity, often in unpaid or low-paid family-based work. This trend is accompanied by a sharp rise in self-employment, with over two-thirds of working women now classified as self-employed, typically in informal and insecure sectors. Even with education levels rising among women, the transition to formal employment remains weak.
  - The World Bank's documents ignore the structural undervaluation of women's unpaid care work, which sustains the economy but is neither acknowledged nor compensated. There is no mention of how career breaks due to motherhood, limited property rights, and systemic barriers in employment push women into cycles of economic vulnerability. The focus remains on narrow indicators such as closing gaps in access or representation without confronting the economic and social foundations of gender oppression.
  - Institutions like the World Bank also fail to account for how inequality itself is gendered. Drawing from economist Thomas Piketty's analysis, wealth inequality has grown sharply since the 1980s. Women, especially from low-income and marginalised communities, are now forced into a shrinking share of opportunity as well as precarious work, while bearing increased responsibility at home. This has led to the feminisation of poverty and labour, where women work more but earn less and remain excluded from real economic power.

- **Impact on Dalits and Adivasis:** The World Bank's silence on caste-based and indigenous exclusion is particularly concerning. Its programmes rarely account for the structural discrimination faced by Dalits and Adivasis, who are disproportionately affected by displacement, joblessness, and welfare exclusions.
  - In India, Adivasi communities constitute a significant share of those displaced by large-scale infrastructure, mining, and energy projects-sectors heavily funded by the Bank.
  - These same communities are also among the most dependent on public services and subsidies for survival-whether it is subsidised food through the PDS, affordable education and healthcare, or state employment schemes. Yet, the Bank's push for privatisation and fiscal rationalisation often leads to the erosion or targeting of these subsidies, without recognising that their removal hits the poorest and most socially marginalised the hardest. By promoting private sector-led growth without safeguards or redistributive protections, the Bank reinforces systems that concentrate resources and access in the hands of dominant castes and classes. In doing so, it legitimises a model of development that is blind to historical injustice and actively exacerbates inequality.

> **In India, Dalits and Adivasis are already being deprived of public resources. But the push for privatisation is transferring control over employment and education to private hands, where affirmative action policies such as reservations do not apply. Yet the Bank rarely acknowledges these vulnerabilities in its evaluations, continuing to push a model of development that deepens structural inequality.**
>
> **- Anirban Bhattacharya**
> *Centre for Financial Accountability in the context of growing inequality and its impacts*

CHAPTER 4

World Bank and the Climate Paradox

Climate Finance as a Paradox

The World Bank has long positioned itself as a leader in climate finance, often branding its initiatives as aligned with global sustainability goals. However, a deeper examination reveals that the institution plays a dual role which simultaneously funds climate mitigation and adaptation projects while perpetuating extractive and ecologically destructive development models and false solutions. This contradiction has led many in civil society, indigenous communities, and global South nations to accuse the World Bank of exacerbating the very crisis it claims to address. This chapter presents evidence from the IPT of how the World Bank functions as both a key architect of the climate crisis and as a gatekeeper of flawed climate finance mechanisms, often in collusion with powerful economic and political actors.

Historical Complicity of the World Bank in the Climate Crisis

The World Bank's role in climate destabilisation cannot be dissociated from its decades-long support for extractive infrastructure, fossil fuel projects, and deforestation schemes.

- From the 1970s through the early 2000s, the Bank has funnelled billions into coal-fired power plants, mega dams, highways, and mining operations, particularly in the Global South – including India. These projects not only displaced communities and depleted ecosystems but also entrenched patterns of fossil fuel dependency and unsustainable industrialisation in national economies.

- Across projects, whether it is the Sardar Sarovar Dam or the Tata Mundra Project - the World Bank's own environmental assessments during these decades often acknowledged the severe ecological and social risks posed by these investments but these concerns were routinely subordinated to economic growth imperatives.

- Taking a significant position in the climate finance landscape, through instruments like the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), Green Climate Fund (GCF) partnerships, and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), the Bank played a commanding role in influencing over how climate funds are allocated and monitored. This also marked a significant shift from a climate justice to climate investment approach.

- Despite global scientific consensus on climate change since the late 1980s, the World Bank continued business-as-usual financing. Between 2015, the year of the landmark Paris Agreement and 2021, the Bank has invested at least $23 billion in fossil fuel infrastructure, justifying it as support for existing contracts or trade facilitation. However, investigative research has shown that a significant portion of this finance was channelled through indirect vehicles such as "trade finance, or "legacy commitments" guarantees, and financial intermediaries, which allowed the Bank to circumvent its own 2019 pledge to stop supporting fossil fuels. In 2022 alone, $3.7 billion flowed into upstream fossil fuel sectors.

Support to False Solutions

The institutional vocabulary of "just transition," "resilience," and "loss and damage" has been co-opted into frameworks that prioritise "bankable" projects and macroeconomic metrics, often sidelining equity or community ownership. The World Bank's approach on climate vulnerability neglects the deeper socio-political and ecological roots of crisis focusing the matter only as a financial risk. Once a champion of the capitalist development model that fuelled the climate crisis, now positions itself as a leader in climate mitigation. But beneath its green rhetoric lies a dangerous agenda: the promotion of false solutions that entrench financialisation over ecological justice.

- The Bank's FCPF and REDD+ programmes have monetised forests as carbon sinks, encouraging monoculture plantations under the guise of afforestation. These programmes, however, displace Indigenous and forest-dependent communities, degrade biodiversity, and commercialise nature without addressing the root causes of emissions. While framed as a climate mitigation tool, REDD+ has triggered widespread resistance from indigenous communities who contest the erasure of customary rights, forced displacement, and FPIC.

- While appearing green, World Bank-backed solar parks and wind farms, especially in India, demonstrate another layer of environmental and social harm. In Gujarat's Pavagada Solar Park and similar projects across Assam and Karnataka, communities have been dispossessed of land through coercive leasing or direct purchases without fair consent. Groundwater depletion, biodiversity loss, and erosion of local livelihoods followed, exposing the fallacy of "clean" energy when corporate-driven.

- The World Bank encourages schemes whereby polluters can compensate for their emissions by investing in afforestation or forest conservation initiatives, frequently in developing countries. These schemes typically result in displacement of indigenous and forest peoples, undermining their traditional livelihoods and cultural heritage. In Himachal Pradesh, hydropower projects like Karcham Wangtoo and Baspa II, deceptively marketed as renewable and eligible for carbon credits, led to deforestation, displacement, and increased landslides, while carbon credits were sold globally despite dubious offset calculations. This is an illustration of how environmental damaging projects are rebranded as climate solutions so that the polluters can benefit from their destructive activities. Since 2014, Karcham Wangtoo has sold nearly 30 million carbon credits to these companies, while Baspa II has issued around 16 million credits since 2010[7].

- In New Delhi, the Okhla waste-to-energy plant releases toxic pollutants while earning UN-certified carbon credits. Years of protests and health complaints by local residents failed to stop the project from making profits under carbon market mechanisms, illustrating how toxic infrastructure can be disguised as a green initiative. This greenwashing of harmful projects is a common tactic used by the World Bank and its partners to promote projects that are environmentally and socially damaging.

- In coastal regions, projects like the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and ENCORE programmes, piloted with World Bank support, have further marginalised fisher communities. Under the guise of conservation and blue economy development, lands and commons critical for coastal livelihoods have been appropriated for port expansion, tourism, and corporate fisheries.

[7] https://scroll.in/article/1070568/how-hydropower-projects-in-himachal-sold-dubious-carbon-credits

Public climate finance is increasingly used to de-risk private investment, while fossil fuel projects still receive support. In places like Malaysia's Salwan region, land once stewarded by Indigenous communities has been seized by asset management firms and marketed as eco-tourism-transforming culture, land, and livelihoods into investment products.

These are not climate solutions; they are capitalism's new frontier. The World Bank is using the climate crisis to repackage and rescue a failing economic model. Instead of supporting community-led conservation, it promotes mechanisms that deepen inequality and extraction. Climate justice demands a break from this trajectory and not its greenwashed continuation.

> **The World Bank's knowledge bank does not only push false narratives but also pioneers false solutions, violating human rights and undermining the resource rights of communities who depend on nature for their survival.**
>
> **- Soumya Dutta**
> *Movement for Advancing Understanding on Sustainability and Mutuality*

Climate Finance Management: Financialisation of the Crisis

In recent years, the World Bank has repositioned itself as a major "climate finance manager," administering critical funds like the Green Climate Fund, Clean Technology Fund, and the newly established Loss and Damage Fund. However, the climate finance architecture under the World Bank is deeply flawed and has been co-opted as a tool to impose debt burdens on the Global South.

- The 2009 Copenhagen Accord promised that developed countries would mobilise $100 billion annually by 2020 to support developing nations in climate mitigation and adaptation. This amount was raised further to $300 billion at COP29, even though for years, developing countries have demanded a trillion dollars in climate finance in order to better adapt to the impacts of climate change and to lead efforts in reducing carbon emissions. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), developing nations will need an estimated $5.04–6.88 trillion in total by 2030 to meet their climate goals which is equivalent to an annual requirement of $455–584 billion.[8]

- Instead of direct grants that would genuinely support vulnerable countries, a significant proportion of the funds routed through the World Bank and MDBs have come in the form of loans. This approach has increased the debt burdens of already climate-affected nations, forcing them into cycles of repayment for a crisis they did not create. Climate finance, in effect, has become climate debt, trapping frontline communities into financial obligations that erode sovereignty, autonomy, and developmental prospects.

- The World Bank's broader institutional model has been to treat climate action as an investment opportunity rather than an issue of justice and reparation. Loan-based instruments, PPPs, risk guarantees, and blended finance schemes dominate the Bank's portfolio, privileging returns to investors over restitution to impacted populations.

[8] https://india.mongabay.com/2024/11/delivering-a-trillion-dollars-in-climate-finance-is-doable-experts-say/

- The Loss and Damage Fund, a mechanism meant to compensate communities for irreversible climate impacts and damages has been placed under the custodianship of the World Bank which serves as both the trustee and host of the Fund. This structure grants the World Bank considerable leverage in shaping the governance and disbursement of climate finance and also reinforces the Bank's alignment with the interests of its major shareholders, potentially subordinating the needs and priorities of vulnerable nations to broader institutional and geopolitical agendas. Additionally, the Loss and Damage Fund, seeks to convert grants intended for reparations into "transitional loans." This turns compensation for historical environmental injustice into new debt obligations for the Global South.

- Moreover, the "Report of the ad hoc subcommittee on the administrative budget on matters relating to cost recovery of the World Bank" from September 2024 reveals how between July 2024 and June 2025, the combined costs for hosting trustee services are projected to exceed $6 million, which will be deducted directly from the resources of the Fund. Instead of empowering grassroots resilience or community-led solutions, climate finance under the World Bank becomes a new site for financial extraction and elite capture.[9]

The larger implications of this arrangement are systemic. It reproduces colonial hierarchies wherein decision-making authority rests overwhelmingly with developed nations - the principal shareholders of the World Bank. The very countries most responsible for historical carbon emissions retain control over who receives funds, under what conditions, and for what kinds of projects. Meanwhile, frontline communities—particularly in the Global South bear the ecological and financial risks of a global system built on their dispossession.

[9] https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/FLD-B3-04-Report

Knowledge, Expertise, and the Myth of the "Climate-Savvy Bank

The World Bank often describes itself as a "Knowledge Bank." Yet, it has persistently ignored scientific and local wisdom that critiques its development model. Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and other institutions have repeatedly warned against carbon-intensive growth models, biodiversity destruction, and the risks of industrial agriculture. However, the World Bank has continued to promote exactly these trajectories through its financing decisions. In many instances, its own internal safeguard assessments acknowledge the gendered, nutritional, and ecological risks of projects, but these acknowledgments rarely translate into remedial action. India serves as a perfect example to this contradiction.

- Despite decades of access to scientific data such as IPCC reports and biodiversity assessments, the World Bank ignored ecological warnings available since the 1970s. The World Bank "knowledge bank" chose to treat climate change as a financial and political issue, thereby prioritising market-based "business-as-usual" models over urgent, science-backed climate action. It uses climate finance as a trojan horse for Global South countries to negotiate on behalf of their financial and geopolitical interests which is a distortion of both climate knowledge and justice principles.

> **Despite knowing everything, the World Bank continues to promote the same extractive model that caused the climate and biodiversity crises**
>
> **- Harjeet Singh**
> *Satat Sampada Climate Foundation*

- On the one hand, the Bank supports ambitious climate pledges by financing renewables and urban resilience programmes. On the other, it continues to fund mega-infrastructure projects such roads, freight corridors, airports that drive fossil fuel use and displace thousands. For example, the Bhadla and Pavagada solar parks in Rajasthan and Karnataka, funded through World Bank credit lines, have been executed without adhering to land acquisition safeguards, environmental impact assessments, or community consultation processes. In Pavagada, land was acquired through the so-called "lease method," often by coercion or manipulation, bypassing legal protections won through decades of struggle.

- The current government's climate commitments are increasingly shaped by the logic of EoDB and investor guarantees, with the World Bank playing a catalytic role. Whether it is through skill-building for app-based gig work (without talking about job security or labour protections), privatisation of public infrastructure, or pushing solar parks in forest regions, India's climate trajectory is now deeply embedded in a top-down, extractive vision of development.

- Across the world, in the climate projects the World Bank finances, local knowledge systems, especially those of forest dwellers, pastoralists, and coastal communities, are systematically sidelined. "Scalability" and "bankability" have become the overriding criteria which dismiss community-driven, ecologically sustainable approaches that resist commodification. Rather than supporting decentralised adaptation rooted in place-based knowledge, the Bank promotes top-down, technocratic-centric solutions.

Ultimately, the evidence from the IPT shows that the World Bank has not reformed; it has rebranded. Its climate interventions are a continuation of its historic role: entrenching elite power, facilitating resource extraction, and imposing unjust development models. Under the guise of climate action, the Bank has promoted market-based false solutions, dismantled decentralised governance, and prioritised scalability over sustainability. The discussions at the IPT in Kolkata reinforced the conclusion that the World Bank's strategies, from ineffective internal evaluation mechanisms to deceptive greenwashing and continued financing of destructive projects, reveal a consistent logic of colonial extractivism: the institution operates not as a champion of development but as a key enabler of corporate profit at the expense of people and the planet.

By systematically undermining accountability, promoting false climate solutions, and perpetuating financial dependence, the Bank ensures that the very structures responsible for ecological devastation remain intact. The whitewashing game is not merely a strategy of misinformation - it is a deliberate attempt to control the narrative, silence dissent, and uphold an economic model that thrives on inequality and environmental destruction.

> **Despite knowing everything, the World Bank continues to promote the same extractive model that caused the climate and biodiversity crises**
>
> **- Harjeet Singh**
> *Satat Sampada Climate Foundation*

CHAPTER 5

World Bank's Support to Authoritarian Regimes

The World Bank, an institution originally established to facilitate post-war reconstruction and development, has over time come to embody a more insidious role in the global order. While it presents itself as a neutral facilitator of economic development, the World Bank's operations have frequently aligned with geopolitical agendas of powerful countries and corporate interests. This chapter critically examines two interlinked trajectories: the Bank's consistent support to authoritarian regimes—both historical and contemporary, and its role in promoting digital technologies that erode democratic accountability, facilitate mass surveillance, and institutionalise systemic exclusion. Drawing on evidence presented at the IPT, this chapter looks at how the World Bank's technical and financial interventions are neither neutral nor apolitical. Instead, they are deeply implicated in enabling authoritarian governance, extracting data from the global South, and undermining civil liberties in the name of 'development.'

Historical Foundations: Cold War Alliances and the Colonizers' Club

The origins of the World Bank's complicity with authoritarian regimes lie in the Cold War. The World Bank, alongside the IMF was shaped not only by post-war economic needs but also by the strategic interests of the United States and its Western allies. From the 1950s onwards, many newly decolonised nations sought to build independent economic systems rooted in redistributive justice, state-led planning, and self-reliance. However, such aspirations were quickly branded as threats by the US and its allies, who feared the spread of socialism and the assertion of Third World sovereignty.

- In this context, the World Bank became an instrument of containment. Financing was directed not to progressive or democratic regimes, but to right-wing military dictatorships that pledged allegiance to market capitalism. Notable examples include the military regimes in Chile (under Pinochet), Indonesia (under Suharto), Brazil (during the junta years), Zaire (under Mobutu), and the Philippines (under Marcos). Despite well-documented human rights violations, the Bank continued and often expanded its lending to these regimes. Economic 'development' was used to justify political repression, while authoritarian rulers were celebrated for their ability to implement unpopular policies with minimal resistance.

- This alignment was not accidental. The United States, supported by fellow G7 members, or the so-called 'colonizers' club' have ensured that financial institutions like the World Bank remained aligned with their strategic goals. Leadership positions in these institutions have always been monopolised by representatives from the US and Europe, reinforcing a governance architecture that privileged the interests of global capital over those of newly independent nations. Development finance became a tool for disciplining states, dismantling welfare structures, and re-integrating them into a global economic system premised on inequality.

Contemporary Authoritarianism: Financial Support in the Neoliberal Era

While the Cold War may have ended, the World Bank's support for authoritarianism has continued in new forms.

- In recent decades, it has lent extensively to regimes in Egypt, Tajikistan, Chad, and India, often at times when these governments were presiding over increased state violence and democratic backsliding. The justification remains unchanged: the Bank insists that its operations are 'non-political,' that it only supports economic development. But this claim to neutrality is deeply disingenuous.

- By financing infrastructural megaprojects that displace communities, by promoting liberalised trade regimes that strip workers of protections, and by endorsing land and energy projects that violate Indigenous and local rights, the Bank entrenches authoritarian governance. When people protest against such injustices, they are often met with arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and police or military violence. In the face of this, instead of withdrawing support, the Bank doubles down, often labelling these developments as signs of progress and modernisation.

- India, which is currently the largest recipient of World Bank lending, exemplifies this paradox. Under successive administrations, the country has seen the shrinking of democratic spaces, widespread repression of dissent, and a systematic erosion of rights. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, these trends have intensified. The Modi regime has been widely criticised for undermining media freedom, intimidating the judiciary, incarcerating activists and students, and criminalising dissent through draconian laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Civil society organisations have faced funding crackdowns, and mass protests - in recent times, farmers and those protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act have been violently repressed.

- The World Bank has continued to increase its engagement with the Modi government. It has provided financing for flagship programmes such as Smart Cities, Gati Shakti, and the Digital India campaign. These initiatives have often served to centralise control, surveil populations, and displace vulnerable communities. The Bank's continued support effectively rewards and enables a regime that is systematically hollowing out democratic institutions.

> **The World Bank is guilty of undermining our public sphere, our justice institutions, and social welfare systems. Their financial mechanisms reshape entire societies without accountability**
>
> **- Usha Ramanathan**
> *Legal Expert*

- By legitimising these technocratic interventions and failing to uphold human rights benchmarks, the World Bank has become complicit in reinforcing authoritarian tendencies in India. Its financial and ideological endorsement of Modi's digital and economic agenda not only exacerbates inequality and exclusion but also provides a veneer of global legitimacy to a regime increasingly intolerant of dissent and diversity.

The Digital Turn: Surveillance, Identity, and Control

Perhaps the most profound shift in the World Bank's developmental approach over the last two decades has been its embrace of digital technologies and digital identity systems.

- The flagship project in this domain is India's Aadhaar, a 12-digit unique identification number linked to an individual's biometric and demographic data. Originally framed as a tool to streamline welfare delivery, Aadhaar has become a gateway to all services—banking, telecommunications, education, employment, and even basic food entitlements. Failure of biometric authentication - due to worn fingerprints, connectivity issues, or system failures, has led to widespread exclusion, particularly among the elderly, disabled, and manual workers.

- The World Bank's ID4D (Identification for Development) initiative, supported by philanthropic capital from actors like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has been instrumental in exporting Aadhaar-like models to other countries. Far from being neutral, these systems are rooted in a militarised logic of traceability and surveillance. Many of the biometric technologies used in such programmes were originally developed by US defence agencies like Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). The convergence of military innovation, corporate power, and development policy raises alarming questions about the future of citizenship and state accountability.

Data Extractivism and the Rise of the Data Economy

Closely tied to the promotion of digital identity systems is the rise of data extractivism which a process by which data is treated as a resource to be mined, commodified, and monetised. The World Bank, in partnership with tech companies and philanthropic entities, has become a key player in this transformation. New terms like 'public intent data,' 'private intent data,' and 'community data' have emerged to mask the coercive nature of these processes.

- People are increasingly required to surrender personal data in exchange for basic rights and entitlements. This shift has turned welfare into a conditional, surveillance-based arrangement. Citizens become data subjects, constantly tracked, evaluated, and profiled. The Bank claims this enhances efficiency and reduces leakage. But in reality, it strips people of anonymity, choice, and dignity. As several testimonies during the Tribunal revealed, the exclusion of pensioners due to biometric failures is not a technical glitch - it is a systemic design.

- This data economy also feeds into global financial networks. Data collected in the global South is funnelled through platforms and intermediaries controlled by Northern corporations. In effect, the World Bank has facilitated a new form of imperialism--data colonialism where digital infrastructures displace traditional forms of extraction while deepening structural inequality.

> **We are no longer citizens - we are data subjects. Exclusion is engineered through systems where people can't access pensions or services unless their data fits the system. The data economy is not built for people's rights - it's built to profit from surveillance.**
>
> \- **Usha Ramanathan**
> Legal Expert

Technological Colonialism and Global Governance

Digital authoritarianism does not operate in isolation. It is embedded within broader systems of global governance and militarised capitalism.

- The example of Israel's tech industry, which exports surveillance tools used to control and oppress Palestinians, demonstrates how technology can become an instrument of war and domination. The fact that global tech giants like Google and Microsoft collaborate with these firms, and are themselves deeply involved in World Bank-supported projects speaks to the complicity of corporate capital.

- The language of development has become a smokescreen for militarised governance. Cameras, drones, biometric scanners, and AI-powered predictive tools are deployed not to empower people but to manage and contain them. These technologies are particularly dangerous in the hands of authoritarian states, where dissent is criminalised and the opposition is framed as forces of terrorism.

- Digital tools are being used to reconfigure land and property rights. In Cambodia and Laos, World Bank-supported cadastral digitisation projects have facilitated land grabs by obscuring customary claims and enabling corporate acquisition. This is part of a broader green economy agenda, where natural resources are financialised and sold in the global markets under the guise of sustainability.

The Illusion of Neutrality and the Politics of Development

One of the most persistent and pernicious myths propagated by the World Bank is its claim to neutrality. It insists that its decisions are purely technical, grounded in economic rationale and empirical evidence. However, growing financing of authoritarian regimes clearly indicates that this is a facade. Every choice made by the Bank, from who receives funding to what conditions are attached is profoundly political.

The language of metrics and efficiency masks a deliberate strategy to reshape societies in line with market logic. The Bank does not simply respond to development needs - it defines them. It does not implement policy but also dictates its form and scope. In doing so, it displaces democratic institutions and concentrates power in technocratic elites who are unaccountable to local populations.

This is especially dangerous in the era of digital governance, where decisions are automated, opaque, and irreversible. Algorithms determine who gets access to services, who is flagged as suspicious, and who is rendered invisible. There is no appeal, no negotiation, and no recourse. The very infrastructure of the digital state is designed to eliminate dissent, not accommodate it.

CHAPTER 6

Resistance and Advocacy

Historical Resistance to the World Bank in India

The World Bank's operations in India have frequently been met with resistance from grassroots activists, civil society organisations, and affected communities. While the Bank presents itself as a facilitator of development, it has had direct impacts through its projects, often leading to displacement, environmental degradation, and socio-economic distress. Opposition to these projects has manifested through localised protests and national advocacy efforts that have sought to challenge the Bank's accountability and transparency.

India has historically witnessed several movements that have challenged the World Bank's policies and projects. Through organised resistance and sustained advocacy, Indian communities and activists have not only exposed deficiencies in World Bank-funded projects but have also been instrumental in the establishment of accountability mechanisms. One of the most significant outcomes of these efforts was the creation of the World Bank's Inspection Panel in 1993, a direct consequence of resistance to the Sardar Sarovar Dam. This mechanism was intended to provide affected communities with a formal avenue to contest the Bank's decisions and enhance institutional transparency. Similarly, resistance against the Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project in Gujarat revealed the adverse environmental and social consequences of coal-based energy projects financed by international financial institutions.

These cases illustrate how resistance movements in India have not only contested harmful development models but have also contributed to broader struggles for accountability, transparency, and justice within international financial institutions. While these movements have led to significant victories, the need for continued vigilance remains, particularly as the World Bank modifies its strategies to maintain its influence over policy and financial decisions in India.

Between 1994 and 2024, the World Bank Inspection Panel received 173 cases globally. India filed 22 of them, making up nearly half of South Asia's cases. The Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), which handles cases related to the IFC and MIGA, has also received many cases from India. Of the 19 cases from South Asia, India filed 16, highlighting its central role in holding international financial institutions accountable.

Large-scale movements such as the NBA have been critical in drawing significant national and international attention. Opposition to the World Bank's influence extends to other projects as well. Resistance to projects such as the Singrauli Thermal Power Plant, the Mumbai Urban Transport Project, and the Social Forestry Programmes demonstrates the broader spectrum of opposition across various sectors. These struggles continue to this day, evident in the campaigns against new hydropower projects in the Himalayas and in the persistent resistance by fishworkers along India's coasts. Such movements actively challenge the push for infrastructure projects funded by international financial institutions (IFIs) that prioritise financial returns over environmental sustainability and community rights.

The findings from testimonies presented at the IPT further reinforce these patterns of resistance. The testimonies highlighted the deep-rooted opposition to World Bank-funded projects, illustrating the lived experiences of displaced communities, affected workers, and environmental activists.

Historical Cases and Their Continuing Impact

- Sardar Sarovar Project and the Narmada Bachao Andolan: The NBA led to World Bank reviewing their work for the first time.
  - Resistance efforts against the Sardar Sarovar Project gained momentum due to the lack of proper environmental impact assessments and the failure of rehabilitation measures. The NBA engaged in legal battles, public mobilisations, and international advocacy, including an appeal to the U.S. Congress, which led to the formation of the Morse Commission in 1991. The Morse Commission's report, published in 1992, criticised the World Bank's failure to comply with its own environmental and resettlement policies, concluding that the project lacked adequate safeguards for affected communities. The report exposed the Bank's role in financing projects without accountability and influencing the global discourse on large dam construction.
  - Despite the World Bank's withdrawal from the project in 1993, the Indian government continued construction with alternative funding sources. The impacts of the project remain stark—thousands of families still await proper rehabilitation, and environmental concerns persist. The NBA's resistance efforts extended well beyond the Sardar Sarovar Dam, influencing the global anti-dam movement and strengthening advocacy for indigenous rights and environmental justice.
  - The case of SSP demonstrated how grassroots mobilisation, legal challenges, and global advocacy could force powerful institutions to reconsider their policies. It remains a landmark case in the history of resistance against international financial institutions, emphasising the ongoing need for vigilance and action against unsustainable development projects.

> **When the World Bank first visited the valley, they misrepresented the concerns of the tribals through false translations - an act that exposed the deep disconnect between them and the people. Their objective was to enter the Narmada valley to maximise profits, often without any consideration of the local communities' well-being. It took years of resistance and international pressure to challenge this exploitation and make the world listen to the voices they tried to silence.**
>
> \- **Medha Patkar**
> Narmada Bachao Andolan on resistance to the Sardar Sarovar Project

- **Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project:** The Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project is a 4,000 MW coal-fired power plant located in Mundra, Gujarat. The project, developed by Coastal Gujarat Power Limited (CGPL), a wholly owned subsidiary of Tata Power, was one of India's Ultra Mega Power Projects intended to provide electricity to five states under a 25-year take-or-pay power purchase agreement. The total project cost was estimated at $4.14 billion, with the IFC, the private lending arm of the World Bank, approving a $450 million loan for its development in 2008. The project was envisioned as a solution to India's growing energy needs but was approved despite significant concerns about its environmental and social impacts.

- The project's construction and operations caused severe disruptions to local fishing communities, particularly the Machimar Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan (MASS), a collective of fisherfolk who led resistance efforts. In June 2011, MASS filed a formal complaint with the World Bank's CAO, citing displacement, ecological damage, and loss of livelihood due to the project's heated water discharge into the Arabian Sea. The first CAO audit report (2012) found that the IFC had failed to ensure compliance with its environmental and social norms, including a lack of proper consultation with project-affected communities. The audit highlighted violations in environmental and social guidelines, inadequate impact assessments, harm to the marine environment, and lapses in project monitoring and accountability measures.
- The resistance movement also pursued legal action in U.S. courts, challenging the IFC's immunity. A landmark ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2019 determined that international financial institutions like the IFC do not enjoy absolute immunity from legal accountability, allowing the case against the World Bank's private lending arm to proceed.
- Despite widespread resistance and legal victories, the Tata Mundra project remains operational, continuing to have severe consequences for the local environment and livelihoods.
- Despite multiple CAO reviews and legal proceedings, Tata Power has not undertaken remedial measures, highlighting the weaknesses of international financial institution accountability mechanisms. The lack of corporate responsibility and failure of institutions to enforce compliance have left affected communities in a state of continued struggle, reinforcing the necessity of sustained resistance and advocacy.

- **Mumbai Urban Transport Project:** The MUTP began in 2002 to enhance urban mobility in Mumbai, focusing on improving the suburban rail network and road infrastructure. The World Bank initially provided a $463 million loan through IBRD and an additional $79 million from IDA. By the project's completion, the total funding had increased to $1.123 billion. The World Bank covered approximately 57% of the total project cost, and the Maharashtra State Government and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) funded the rest.
    - Certain communities were systematically excluded from prime resettlement locations, such as Muslim families, who were placed in isolated zones under the guise of avoiding 'nuisance.' Similarly, people with disabilities were concentrated in specific areas rather than being integrated.
    - Developers benefited significantly from this process. High-value land previously occupied by informal settlements was vacated for commercial development, and displaced communities were shifted to low-value peripheral areas. The MMRDA and private developers profited from this arrangement, creating a model that has been replicated in subsequent infrastructure projects.
    - MUTP has also facilitated the entry of international financial institutions into other urban transport projects. While the World Bank is not directly funding the MUTP, it supports supplementary activities that continue the pattern of exclusion and displacement set in motion by MUTP. This project has reshaped urban development in Mumbai, reinforcing a vision of transport infrastructure that prioritises real estate interests over the rights and well-being of affected communities.

- **Singrauli Thermal Power Plant:** The STPP project is located in the Singrauli-Sonbhadra region, spanning Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Initiated in 1977, the project was part of India's large-scale push for coal-based energy production. The World Bank approved a $150 million loan to finance the first power plant in the region, followed by additional financing for expansions and coal mining operations, including the Dudhichua open-pit coal mine in 1985. The STPP now generates about 15% of India's total power.

- ✦ The Independent Review (1997) authorised by the World Bank's Inspection Panel criticised the Bank's failure to adhere to its own environmental and resettlement policies, inadequate compensation, and poor rehabilitation efforts
- ✦ The Singrauli project also set a precedent for future large-scale industrialisation in the region, paving the way for further expansion of coal-based energy production and mining. The model of land acquisition and displacement established by this project has been replicated in subsequent energy and industrial ventures, reinforcing a pattern of environmental destruction and social dislocation. The lack of accountability has left communities vulnerable, as neither the government nor corporations accept responsibility for the worsening conditions, and the World Bank has long since withdrawn, leaving behind devastation.

Continued Resistance

- **Resistance to Hydro Projects in Sikkim:** The struggle against hydroelectric projects in Sikkim highlights the intersection of environmental sustainability, indigenous rights, and economic development. The Teesta River, vital to both Sikkim and West Bengal, has been targeted for multiple hydroelectric projects. Despite strong community opposition, over a dozen projects have been sanctioned, often ignoring the region's seismic vulnerability and ecological fragility. Communities indigenous to Sikkim have been at the forefront of resisting these projects. Their advocacy has included prolonged hunger strikes, community-led research, and legal battles. The collapse of the Chungthang Dam due to a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in 2023 further validated concerns about the unsuitability of large dams in such regions. Yet, accountability mechanisms remain weak, with affected communities receiving little compensation or recognition of their rights.
  - ✦ More than 13 mega-dams have been built on even small tributaries of the Teesta, affecting local ecosystems and communities.
  - ✦ The 2012 earthquake significantly increased the cost of hydro projects, highlighting the region's seismic vulnerability.
  - ✦ A high-altitude dam, constructed over 12 years at an initial cost of ₹5,705 crores, eventually exceeded ₹14,000 crores before being destroyed by a GLOF.
  - ✦ No compensation or rehabilitation has been provided to affected communities, leading to a 950-day hunger strike against the dams, with activists facing arrests.
  - ✦ Climate change has exacerbated the crisis, with decreasing snowfall and depleted groundwater levels, threatening water security.
  - ✦ Sikkim has over 3,000 glaciers, with 16 on the verge of bursting, posing risks not just to Sikkim but also to downstream regions in West Bengal and Bangladesh.
  - ✦ Despite commitments from policymakers to reassess hydro projects, no genuine efforts have been made for dialogue or democratic decision-making.
  - ✦ There is no study on the carrying capacity of the rivers in Sikkim, raising concerns over long-term sustainability.
  - ✦ Recent court cases challenging the dams have been unsuccessful, reflecting the broader lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

- **Resistance of Fishworkers and Issues with the Blue Economy:** The World Bank's involvement in fisheries and coastal economies under the framework of the Blue Economy has been a source of concern for traditional fishing communities across India. Fisherfolk have resisted projects that prioritise large-scale industrial fishing, port expansions, and tourism infrastructure over their livelihoods and marine biodiversity. One of the key issues with the Blue Economy approach is its emphasis on privatisation and corporate-led development. Coastal regulation laws have been repeatedly amended to facilitate large infrastructure projects, undermining the rights of small-scale fishers. The construction of mega-ports and deep-sea fishing ventures, often financed by the World Bank and other international financial institutions, has led to displacement, reduced fish catch, and the loss of access to traditional fishing zones.
  - CRZ laws have been modified to enable infrastructure projects, ignoring the customary rights of fisherfolk. The World Bank piloted coastal zone projects in Gujarat, Odisha, and West Bengal, investing initially for studies on "sustainable management," but these projects later facilitated privatisation.
  - Public consultations on CRZ guidelines are often bypassed. Guidelines state that maps should be provided at a 1:4000 scale for detailed ecological assessments, but authorities often provide 1:25000 scale maps, omitting critical details.
  - The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has mandated that public hearings must be conducted with detailed plans, but public participation is often sidelined. Expansion projects, particularly in hydrocarbon extraction and port development, are exempted from public hearings.
  - In Tamil Nadu, green energy projects are taking over prime agricultural land, displacing farmers and fisher communities. Many projects appoint private agents, reducing government oversight.
  - The Blue Economy is being promoted under the pretext of fisheries development, but it primarily benefits large corporations. A $300 million fisheries project has introduced port development at nearly every coastal village, often without government transparency.
  - The designation of 160 conservation sites under the Blue Economy framework is being used to displace coastal communities, facilitating oil, gas, industrial infrastructure and port development. Fisherfolk are systematically excluded from the decision-making process.
  - Mangrove ecosystems, traditionally safeguarded by fisher communities, are now being exploited for carbon credit projects under false conservation claims, leading to further displacement and commodification of coastal resources.

> **We demand the 4 Rs:**
> **Recognition of customary rights,**
> **Representation in decision-making,**
> **Redistribution of coastal commons, and**
> **Restoration of our lands and voices.**
>
> \- **Jesurathinam Christy**
> National Fishworkers' Forum

Other Legal Challenges

- **Vishnugad Pipalkoti Hydro Electric Project:** One of the most protracted battles has been around the Vishnugad Pipalkoti Hydro Electric Project in Uttarakhand. Since 2012, local communities have filed multiple complaints with the Inspection Panel, documenting how the project disrupted water access, damaged ecosystems, and threatened livelihoods. In a telling pattern, their 2022 complaint was rejected because similar issues had been raised previously - a bureaucratic Catch-22 that privileges procedural technicalities over substantive justice. Yet the communities persist, with a third request filed in 2023, demonstrating how even when official channels fail, the act of resistance itself becomes meaningful.

- **Tea Plantation Workers:** In Assam, tea plantation workers have waged a decade-long battle through the CAO system. Their complaints against Tata Tea (2012-2014) exposed systemic labour abuses, from wage theft to dangerous working conditions. While this forced the IFC to develop an action plan, the case remains "open for compliance monitoring" years later - a partial victory that highlights both the potential and limitations of these grievance mechanisms.

- **Amaravati Capital City Development Programme:** The Amaravati Capital City Development Programme has become a flashpoint. Communities filed a 2024 complaint with the Inspection Panel about forced displacement and lack of consultation. While the Panel deliberates, the case has already served to amplify local demands and attract international scrutiny - demonstrating how even pending complaints can become leverage points for communities.

The patterns of resistance to the World Bank's projects in India demonstrate the resilience and agency of grassroots movements in challenging neoliberal development models. While direct impacts such as displacement, environmental degradation, and economic distress have been well-documented in cases like the MUTP, STPP, and hydro projects in Sikkim, these struggles also reveal a broader trend—paving the way for newer infrastructure projects funded by the World Bank and other financial institutions like the ADB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These institutions replicate the same flawed development models, often under the pretext of bringing benefits to local communities.

Many of these projects are funded based on claims of development, improved infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. However, as seen in cases like MUTP, where displacement far exceeded estimates, or Singrauli, where industrial expansion has devastated livelihoods, the promised benefits rarely materialise for those directly affected. Instead, such projects clear land, displace communities, and restructure urban and rural spaces to facilitate further privatisation and commercial gains. Hydropower projects in Sikkim, framed as sustainable energy solutions, have ignored seismic vulnerabilities and ecological risks, while fisheries development under the Blue Economy framework has prioritised industrial interests over fisherworkers' customary rights.

The ongoing push for large-scale infrastructure projects necessitates continued vigilance and advocacy. Communities must be central in decision-making processes, and financial institutions must be held accountable for the long-term consequences of their investments. Legal battles, grassroots mobilisation, and transnational solidarity remain essential in challenging exploitative development models and advocating for people-centred, sustainable alternatives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Eighty years of World Bank engagement in countries of the Global South, including India, have contributed to the shaping of a corporate-friendly, inequalising development trajectory, marked by unemployment and labour market precarity, displacement with inadequate or no rehabilitation, and environmental damage. Despite trillions of dollars in loans and technical assistance, the everyday realities of people, particularly the poor, women, children, Adivasis, Dalits, fisherfolk, farmers, and urban informal workers have largely remained invisible in the Bank's metrics of success. The testimonies and evidence presented at the IPT in Kolkata show a disturbing continuity in the World Bank's operations that undermine democratic sovereignty and reinforce interest of the elites that have perpetuated dispossession, exclusion, and deepening vulnerability. But there are elements of change accompanying that core continuity. Principally, an institution that shunned the public sector in the early post-Independence years, opted to provide large volumes of credit to the public sector as a means of influencing macroeconomic and sectoral policies, and open the door for private participation and takeover of activities and spaces which India's post-Independence policy agenda had reserved for the private sector to ensure affordable provision and check concentration of assets in the hands of foreign investors and domestic oligopolies.

What was made clear across more than 30 testimonies is that the World Bank has not reformed - it has only rebranded. The terminology of structural adjustment has been extended to include concepts and terms such as "policy-based lending," "public-private partnerships," and "climate finance", which are even-more coercive. Beneath the shifts in vocabulary lies a relentless push toward privatisation, deregulation, and financialisation which seek to legitimise neoliberal capitalism. These processes have not been incidental but are foundational to the Bank's modus operandi. They fragment the social obligations of the state and create new means of accumulation for capital that are fundamentally exclusionary. This has resulted in a technocratic and top-down approach that has delivered uneven and unjust outcomes.

Massive hydropower and coal projects funded by the Bank have displaced entire communities, often without fair compensation and at huge environmental costs. Market driven sectoral reforms in agriculture, education, and health have led to increased user charges and the privatisation of essential services, leaving the poor to fend for themselves in commodified public systems. The Bank's support for financialisation, from carbon markets to policy-based lending, has only deepened inequality while obscuring the root causes of poverty and ecological crisis.

It is the most vulnerable groups that have borne the brunt of these policies. Women's unpaid work has been ignored; their labour rendered invisible even as public services that supported them are gutted. Adivasi and forest communities have been displaced in the name of conservation and energy transition, even as their traditional ecological knowledge is dismissed. Urban informal workers, including street vendors, sanitation workers, daily wage earners have been evicted or excluded in the name of "smart cities" and "world-class infrastructure". These outcomes are not aberrations - they are the predictable results of a development paradigm that privileges corporate interests over people and planet.

The IPT also found evidence of how World Bank supported, aided and abetted authoritarianism throughout the Global South, including in India, which is now the largest borrower from the Bank. It also presented cases of how digitisation of citizen IDs, backed by the World Bank, strips individuals of basic rights through exclusion from services, while enabling mass surveillance, data misuse, and state control without consent.

The World Bank has never been a neutral actor. Its policies are deeply enmeshed in the power structures of imperialism. A handful of countries in the Global North, particularly the United States and its allies, wield outsized influence over its agenda and operations. The "one dollar, one vote" system and the “America First” approach ensure that decisions are made to safeguard the interests of financial and geopolitical elites rather than the priorities of the Global South.

Meanwhile, through initiatives such as the Accountability Mechanism, Inspection Panel and Independent Evaluation Group, the World Bank attempts to create an impression of being open to scrutiny by non-biased institutions. But created by the Bank itself, these institutions are subject to hidden conflicts of interest, and touch, if at all, only the surface of the many violations the Bank’s activities reflect. Even to the extent they do, there is little or no evidence of efforts at correction.

The deeper logic of these transformations lies in the Bank’s allegiance to global finance capital. Under the guise of facilitating development, it enforces an agenda that restructures economies to suit capital’s mobility and profitability, and ensures it protection. It has done so by leveraging crises, whether through structural adjustment policies or COVID-19 recovery packages, using crises as opportunities to push through deregulation, privatisation, and austerity. Its knowledge production through reports, rankings, and metrics constructs a world in which alternatives and resistance are delegitimised. Its economic models reduce development to GDP growth, which is in contradiction with the effort t impose fiscal discipline and austerity to open up space for the private sector in the name of sustaining or restoring investor confidence. But as this report has revealed, this vision is not only exclusionary, it is also unsustainable. It has led to rising inequality, ecological collapse, socio-economic precarity, and deepening democratic erosion.

The path forward must begin with a clear rejection of this model.

The findings of the IPT call for a fundamental transformation in how development is conceived, financed, and implemented. The World Bank must be held accountable for the harm caused by its projects and policies. But more than that, we must collectively imagine and demand alternatives that centre justice, equity, and sustainability.

For this, the complete renewal and overhauling of the international financial architecture centred non the Bretton Woods institutions is required, so as to establish an architecture led by the Global Majority countries, grounded in principles of equity, sovereignty, and solidarity.

The IPT has attempted to serve as a crucial space not just for bearing witness and envisioning alternatives but also for asserting the urgent need for systemic transformation. This transformation demands reclaiming development as a political, not merely technical, process which is rooted in redistribution, ecological sustainability, and democratic control.

ANNEXURE

Annexure 1: Session

Independent People's Tribunal on World Bank
Programme Schedule

**Venue: Bharat Sabha Hall, Gate No-5, Central Metro Rail Station,
62, Bepin Behari Ganguly St, Bowbazar, Kolkata, West Bengal 700012**

Date: December 7 – 8, 2024

Time	**Session Details**	**Speakers**
7 December 2024, Day 1		
9:30 am - 10:30 am	**Inaugural Session**	**Moderator: Shalmali Guttal**
9:30 am - 9:40 am	Welcome and About the IPT	
9:40 am - 10:30 am	Opening Plenary	Medha Patkar, Prafulla Samantra, Shalmali Guttal, Shaktiman Ghosh
10:30 am - 11:30 am	**Session 1: Introductory Session**	**Moderator: Joe Athialy**
About: This session will provide a background on the involvement of the World Bank Group in India, its changing nature of interventions, operations and areas of focus. This session will also address the pressing issue of accountability, highlighting the Bank's legal immunity that limits recourse for affected communities and challenges the transparency of its operations. By examining these evolving roles and the significant accountability gaps, this session will establish a broad overview for understanding the World Bank's complex and penetrating influence in India.		
10:30 am - 10:45 am	*The Bretton Woods Institutions in India: Foundations, Influence, and Evolution*	Edwin
10:45 am - 10:55 am	*Lending Priorities: The World Bank's Portfolio in India's Key Sectors*	Maju Varghese

10:55 am - 11:05 am	*From Loans to Leverage: The Evolving Tactics of World*	Ashwin Parthasarathy
11:05 am - 11:15 am	*Beyond Oversight: The Broken Mechanisms of World Bank*	Joe Athialy
11:15 am - 11:30 am	*Aiding and Abetting Authoritarianism*	Shalmali Guttal
11:30 am - 11:45 am	**TEA**	
11:45 am - 11:50 am	**Official Transfer of Proceedings to the Jury**	
11:50 am - 2:00 pm	**Session 2: Legacy Cases: Lasting Impacts and Current**	**Prosecutor: Joe Athialy**
About: This session will look at the impact of key legacy cases in India and the role they have played in shaping accountability and transparency mechanisms in the internal functioning of the Bank and other IFIs. The session will present learnings from these cases as well as reflect on their current status. It will also look at the role of grassroots advocacy and activism in shaping outcomes, driving reforms and holding institutions accountable.		
11:50 am - 12:05 am	*Sardar Sarovar Dam and Power Project (SSDPP)*	Medha Patkar
12:05 am - 12:20 am	*Tata Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project*	Bharat Patel
12:20 am - 12:35 pm	*World Bank Social Forestry Programme*	Roma
12:35 pm - 12:50 pm	*Mumbai Urban Transport Project*	Shweta Tambe
12:50 pm - 1:05 pm	*Singrauli*	Awadhesh Kumar
1:05 pm - 1:45 pm	*Q&A*	
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	**LUNCH**	
3:00 pm - 6:30 pm	**Session 3: Influence on Key Sectors**	**Prosecutor: Thomas Franco**
About: This session will undertake thematic examinations on how World Bank policies have shaped key public sectors in India. The session will analyse the impacts of the Bank's financial and policy interventions, highlighting how these sectors have been influenced by the push for market-driven reforms. The session will assess the social, economic, and environmental consequences of these policies, including the erosion of public services, reduced access for vulnerable populations, and the prioritisation of corporate interests over public welfare and present the long-term implications for equitable development.		

3:00 pm - 3:15 pm	*Agriculture*	Vijoo Krishnan
3:15 pm - 3:30 pm	*Health*	Ravi Duggal
3:30 pm - 3:45 pm	*Education*	Mitra Ranjan
3:45 pm - 4:00 pm	*Water*	Rehmat
4:00 pm - 4:30 pm	**TEA**	
4:30 pm - 4:45 pm	*Urban*	Jammu Anand
4:45 pm - 5:00 pm	*Energy*	Soumya Dutta
5:00 pm - 5:15 pm	*Banking*	Thomas Franco
5:15 pm - 5:30 pm	*Mining*	Ashok Srimali
5:30 pm - 5:45 pm	*Hydro-Power*	Mayalmit Lepcha
5:45 pm - 6:30 pm	*Q&A*	
8 December 2024, Day 2		
9:00 am - 11:00 am	**Session 4: Undermining the Public Sphere, People's**	**Prosecutor: Shalmali Guttal**
About: This session will look at the various financial mechanisms promoted by the World Bank that prioritise corporate interests at the expense of the public welfare. The focus of the session would be to demonstrate how financing strategies of the World Bank have come at huge social and environmental costs. Additionally, frameworks and initiatives promoted by the World Bank are used by Governments to adopt neo-liberal agendas that have resulted in significant dilutions of social and environmental regulations and safeguards in India.		
9:00 am - 9:15 am	*EoDB: Undermining India's Environmental Protections*	Lara Jesani
9:15 am - 9:30 am	*B-Ready: Undermining India's Labour Protections*	Gautam Mody
9:30 am - 9:45 am	*Promoter of Wealth Inequality*	Anirban Bhattacharya

9:45 am - 10:00 am	*The Costs of Privatisation and the National Monetisation Pipeline*	Sushil Khanna
10:00 am - 10:15 am	*Impact on Gender*	Anuradha Talwar
10:15 am - 10:30 am	*Championing Technologies of Surveillance and Exclusion: The Story of UID*	Usha Ramanathan
10.30 am - 10.45 am	*Right to Food and Work*	Raj Shekhar Singh
10:45 am - 11:15 am	*Q&A*	
11:15 am - 11:30 am	**TEA**	
11:30 am - 1:30 pm	**Session 5: World Bank & The Climate Paradox: *An Enabler of the Climate Crisis***	**Prosecutor: Bhargavi Rao**
About: This session will examine the conflicting role of the World Bank in fueling the climate crisis while posturing itself as a leader in climate solutions. Despite continuing pledges to fight climate change, the Bank continues to finance projects that harm ecosystems and displace vulnerable communities, often under the guise of development. The session will look at the gaps in the World Bank's climate finance initiatives, showing how funds are channelled toward economic growth-oriented projects—such as energy and infrastructure—rather than invest in projects that genuinely address climate mitigation or adaptation.		
11:30 am - 11:45 am	*Contradictions of a Climate Crisis: A Perpetuator of the Climate Crisis*	Soumya Dutta
11:45 am - 12:00 pm	*Climate Finance: Another Veil to Promote Infra and Energy Projects, Lacuna of the L&D Fund*	Harjeet Singh
12:00 pm - 12:15 pm	*Testimonials from the Ground: Blue Economy*	Jesurathinam Christy
12:15 pm - 12:30 pm	*Promoter of False Solutions*	Souparna Lahiri
12:30 pm - 1:15 pm	*Q&A*	
1:15 pm - 1:30 pm	**Vote of Thanks**	
1:30 pm onwards	**LUNCH**	
3:30 pm onwards	**Press Conference with Preliminary Findings/Thoughts**	

Annexure 2: About the Jury

The Independent People's Tribunal was presided over by a distinguished jury comprising eminent academics, journalists, and human rights defenders. The jury heard testimonies from experts, researchers, and civil society representatives on the wide-ranging impacts of International Financial Institutions in India.

The jury members comprised of:

- **Prof. Anuradha Chenoy** – Adjunct Professor at the Jindal School of International Affairs, Jindal Global University; former Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

- **Prof. C. P. Chandrasekhar** – Economist and Retired Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
 (Prof. Chenoy and Prof. Chandrasekhar also served on the International Jury.)

- **Pamela Philipose** – Senior Journalist and Fellow at the Indian Council of Social Science Research.

- **Sujato Bhadra** – Former Professor and Human Rights Activist.

Annexure 3: About the Speakers

- **Medha Patkar:** A prominent Indian activist known for her leadership in the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which aimed to stop the Sardar Sarovar Dam project due to its impact on local tribal communities. Her activism played a crucial role in raising awareness about forced displacement and environmental justice.

- **Prafulla Samantara:** Prafulla Samantara is an environmental activist from Odisha. He is active in supporting and leading many struggles in Odisha. He was at the forefront of the protests against POSCO and plans for bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hill range. Samantara was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2017.

- **Shaktiman Ghosh:** Shaktiman Ghosh is the founder and National General Secretary of the National Hawker Federation, an association of Street Vendors across 28 States in the country, with 1,250+ Unions.

- **Joe Athialy:** Joe Athialy works with the Centre for Financial Accountability. Previously, he worked at the Narmada Bachao Andolon, the National Alliance of People's Movements, Amnesty International India and the Bank Information Centre in various roles.

- **Edwin:** Edwin has extensive experience in grassroots work, campaigns, national and international NGOs. He has worked closely with Adivasi and Dalit rights organizations, focusing on labour issues and modern slavery, and was part of the Dalit caucus team at the World Conference Against Racism. As a trustee and CEO of Human Rights Forum since 2014, he has led organizational growth and initiatives such as SDG Watch Tamil Nadu.

- **Maju Varghese:** Maju Varghese works with the Centre for Financial Accountability. Previously he worked with the National Fishworkers Forum, YUVA Mumbai, Oxfam India, and the Bank Information Center in various capacities.

- **Ashwin Parthasarathy:** Ashwin works with the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development in their Energy Systems Transformation Team. He is also pursuing his doctorate at the University of Mumbai.

- **Shalmali Guttal:** Shalmali Guttal is a member of the IPES-Food panel, and senior analyst (and former executive director) at Focus on the Global South – an activist think tank in Asia providing analysis & building alternatives for just social, economic & political change. She is also a member of the working group on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), since May 2024.

- **Bharat Patel:** Dr. Bharat Patel is the General Secretary of Machimar Adhikaar Sangharsh Sangathan (Association for the Rights of Fishworkers) in Kutch, Gujarat. He has been key in setting up a producer company for fisher people in Kutch, saving them from the clutches of middlemen while selling their products. Bharat was also key in filing a case against World Bank's private sector arm International Finance Corporation in the US, which resulted in the historic US Supreme Court ruling that the World Bank Group does not enjoy absolute immunity.

- **Roma Malik:** Roma Malik is General Secretary of the All India Union for Forest Working People. She has worked closely with forest tribes, local authorities, and the judicial system to design a forest governance model for her native India.

- **Shweta Damle:** Shweta Damle has been working in the development sector for the last 20 years. Over the years she has worked on issues of housing and community development with a focus on adolescent girls and women in Mumbai.

- **Thomas Franco:** Thomas Franco is the former General Secretary of the All India Bank Officers Confederation and currently coordinates the Peoples Commission on Public Sector and Public Services.

- **Vijoo Krishnan**: Dr. Vijoo Krishnan is a writer on Agrarian Issues and General Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha. He is a central committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). He is one of the key organisers of Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan (Movement for Land Rights).

- **Ravi Duggal:** Ravi Duggal is a sociologist, health researcher and activist associated with the People's Health Movement.

- **Mitra Ranjan:** Mitra Ranjan, is an activist associated with the RTE Forum. His area of expertise includes primary and secondary education.

- **Rehmat:** Rehmat is an affected person of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. He is a social activist and researcher. He has been associated with Manthan Adhyan Kendra for nearly two decades. He has played a role in exposing the ground reality on issues related to water privatization, especially the privatization of urban water supply.

- **Soumya Dutta:** Soumya Dutta is Co convenor of South Asian Peoples Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC) and a former member of the advisory board of the UN Climate Technology Centre and Network. He is a people science and climate justice activist for the last 3 decades. Soumya Dutta has been working with social movements and civil society organisations building their capacities on energy and climate-related issues in their demands for building a just and equitable world.

- **Anirban Bhattacharya:** He is the team lead, National Finance team at the Centre for Financial Accountability. He is part of the campaign to tax the rich and an advocate for democratic rights. Previously he worked with Centre for Equity Studies.

- **Lara Jesani:** Lara Jesani is a lawyer, practising human rights law in the Mumbai High Court. She is a part of People's Union for Civil Liberties.

- **Usha Ramanathan:** Usha Ramanathan works on the jurisprudence of law, poverty and rights. She is the South Asia Editor of Law, Environment and Development Journal (LEAD Journal), a peer-reviewed academic journal jointly published by IELRC and SOAS. She has been tracking, and engaging with, the Indian national ID project and has written, and debated extensively, on the subject.

- **Souparna Lahiri:** Souparna Lahiri is associated with the All India Forum of Forest Movements and the Global Forest Coalition. He was part of the Community Conservation Resilience Initiative (CCRI)- a global initiative by Indigenous and non-indigenous Organizations who carried out grassroots studies in 68 communities of 22 countries showing the resilience of community conservation.

- **Harjeet Singh:** Harjeet Singh is a global advocate for climate and social justice. Currently, as the Global Engagement Director at the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative, he brings extensive experience to his role. Previously, Harjeet held positions such as Head of Global Political Strategy at Climate Action Network (CAN) International and played a leadership role in climate justice initiatives at ActionAid.

- **Anuradha Talwar:** Anuradha Talwar is a trade union activist who works with rural labour. She is actively involved with Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity, a non-party registered union of agricultural workers and many other non-party independent unorganised sector worker unions and tea plantation workers.

- **Ashok Srimali:** Ashok Srimali is Secretary General of mines, minerals & PEOPLE, members of which are people affected by mining with more than 100 grassroots groups spread across 16 States. He is also associated with SETU: Center for Social Knowledge and Action in Ahmedabad.

- **Mayalmit Lepcha:** Mayalmit Lepcha is a human rights advocate from the Lepcha community in Northeast India, and serves as the president of Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association and the General Secretary of Affected Citizens of Teesta.

- **Awadhesh Kumar:** Awadhesh Kumar is a social activist working among the people in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh is 1980’s who are affected by coal projects, mining and other industries. He has been a part of the Lokayan.

- **Gautam Mody:** Gautam Mody is a trade unionist and currently the General Secretary of the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI).

- **Sushil Khanna:** Sushil Khanna is a retired professor of Economics and Strategy Management at IIM Calcutta. He has been an Advisor, State Planning Board, Kerala Government and Chairman. Kerala Finance Corp. His experience includes working with large private and public sector companies like BHEL, Indian Oil, ONGC, HPCL, NTPC, Tata Tea, TISCO, Murugappa Group and others.

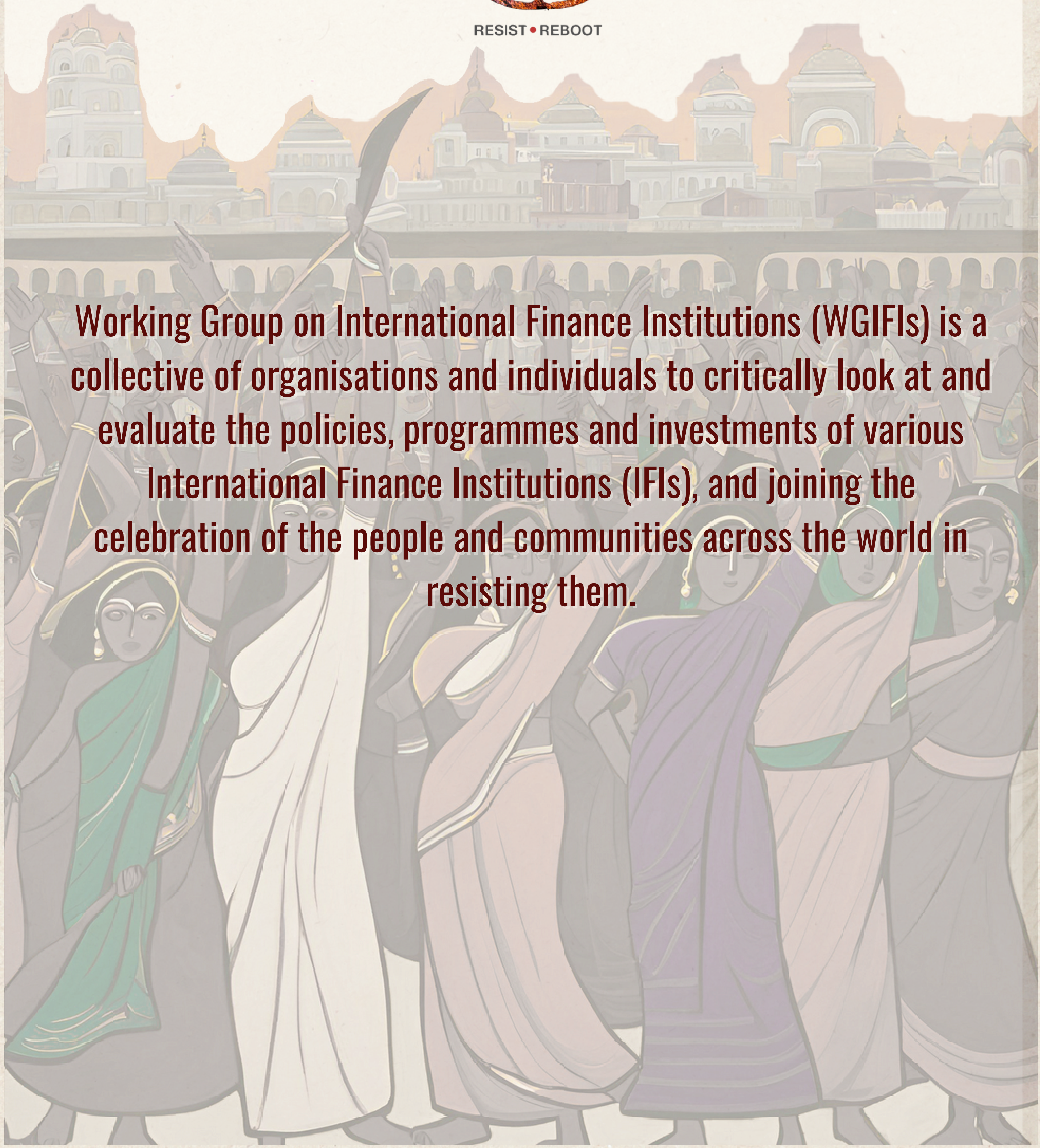
- **Bhargavi Rao:** Bhargavi Rao is an independent researcher/educator/consultant. She works at the intersections of community action with law, policy, planning and governance.

- **Jesurathinam Christy:** Jesurathinam Christy is the director of Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA) in Tamilnadu. Jesu works amongst the fisher people and holds senior positions at National Fishworkers Forum and World Forum of Fisher Peoples.

- **Raj Shekhar Singh:** Raj Shekhar is an activist-researcher from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh. He has worked with the people-led Right to Food Campaign as National Coordinator and has worked with various other movements focusing on rights such as work, wages, health and so on. Currently he is studying the changes in the lives of communities in his hometown in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh due to the land acquisition done for the Purvanchal Expressway.

WORLD BANK / IMF @ 80

RESIST • REBOOT



Working Group on International Finance Institutions (WGIFIs) is a collective of organisations and individuals to critically look at and evaluate the policies, programmes and investments of various International Finance Institutions (IFIs), and joining the celebration of the people and communities across the world in resisting them.

Working Group on International Financial Institutions

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