

About the author

Dr. Sunil Dutt Kainthola has a Ph.D. in experimental psychology. He worked for some years as a senior research officer with the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped in India, developing psychometric assessment tools and intervention programmes for visually handicapped preschool children. His college associations with the youth movement in India resurfaced in 1994 and led him to joining the Uttarakhand Separate Statehood movement. He was also closely associated with the Uttarakhand Sanskritic Morcha, a confederation of cultural and literary organisations. In 1995, together with some comrades, he established Janadhar, an umbrella organisation working for the development of remote mountain communities, and in 1998 he helped form the Alliance for Development, a research and advocacy network to address some of the critical development issues in the mountain areas of Uttarakhand. At present, Kainthola is the Secretary of Janadhar and convener of the Alliance. His areas of interest are research and activism on issues like conservation and development-induced displacement in mountain areas, community-based conservation, equity in the upcoming ecotourism business in the NBDR, gender specifically intervention against trafficking, disability management, entrepreneurship, and networking.

The picture of village women hugging forest trees to prevent felling by state-organised timber concessionaires captured the world's imagination in the early 1970s, and etched a permanent place in the history of the conservation movement. A decade later, the very communities where this conservation activism – the 'Chipko movement' – had its roots lost much of their access rights to their traditional commons in the name of conservation.

This Talking Points document revisits these communities three decades after their successful struggle – and describes in concrete figures and terms some of the realities and impacts of conservation on their lives and livelihoods. What the authors describe echoes the situation in many conservation areas around the world: well-meaning conservation measures have failed the very communities that have preserved the landscape down the centuries. In Nanda Devi there are signs that the plight of the local communities has been recognised, and changes are being introduced to redress the balance – but much remains to be done. This book hopes to contribute to the discussions on the special needs and moral rights of communities in conservation areas, and help governments and policymakers to realise the need to integrate communities and local needs into conservation plans.

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