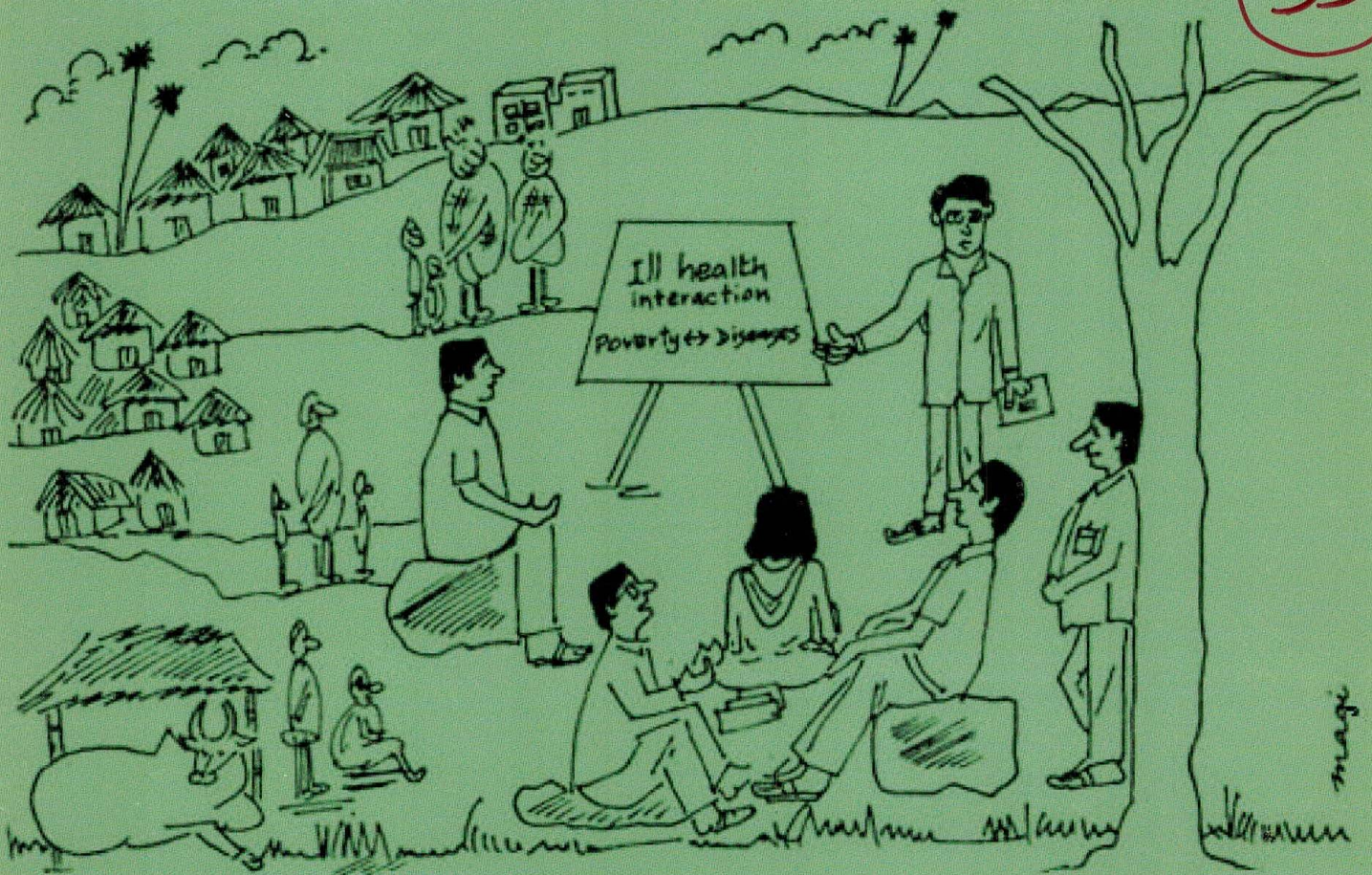


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A Report on the Community Health Learning Experience

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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

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REPORT

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Contents

The pathway to the present	2
It all begins at home!	3
How I landed up with CHLP	4
Overview and acknowledgments	4
My personal involvement with the Right to Food Campaign	5
Dharna against proposed National Food Security Bill	6
Personal Reflections	7
Public hearing for starvation deaths – Gaya, Bihar	8
NAC consults Right to Food campaign members at Delhi for National Food Security Act	9
National Convention of Right to food & work	9
Food security – the way I look at it	9
Sustainability of Sustainable agricultural method and present ways of promotion of organic food	10
Our lives in our hands - Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan	10
Urban groups & members/volunteers of AID (association of India's development)	15
Visit to Harola Basti at Sector 5, noida where Mobile Chreche works	15
Slums of Noida Sector 16	15
Celebration of 20 years of MKSS struggle on May-Day at Bhim	16
Sangathan of People Displaced by Bargi Dam and Kisaan Adivasi Sangathan	17
Chutka Parmanu Sangarsh Samiti	18
Barela Thermal Power Plant	19
Hazardous Effects of Coal fired Thermal Power Plants	20
Kisan Adivasi Sangathan – Kesla	21
Mozda Collective	21
Jan Jagaran Shakti Sangathan, Bihar	22
CHLP Orientation in Bangalore and visits to Hannur and Raichur	25
Classroom sessions	25
Raichur visit	25
Nav Jeevana Mahila Okhuta (NJMO)	27
PRA Workshop at Hannur	27
Future Plans	27
Annexure I - People's hearing on starvation deaths and food related schemes in Gaya	28
Annexure II- Appeal: Condemn arrests of adivasis in Barwani, MP	31
Annexure III - Right to food Campaign – April 2010 to November 2010	32

The pathway to the present

I was brought up in a typical middle-income Gujarati family in Ahmedabad – the heart of Gujarat. I was a fairly studious kid who did consistently well throughout the school years. Though engineering colleges weren't so rampant in my time, I was able to get an unpaid seat in a top-ranked engineering institute of Gujarat. Having secured admission in Bachelors in Electronics and Communication, I wanted to 'make it count', especially having seen my father toil a bit to meet with the expenses in the early years. So, I harbored no plans for post graduation and jumped right onto Reliance Communications.

Most people, however humble, like to feel as if they are special, and I was no different. The first day in Reliance, however, made me feel a little too special! It was upon learning the astounding fact that I was one of the few first ever girls to have been employed in those office premises that year. This was my first spectacular encounter with the male chauvinistic aspect of the society, although now I know that in my own parental home, a number of small things should have been done differently.

Thereafter, a series of job changes almost each involving a new city took me to different cities and countries. It helped me understand various cultures beyond merely books and movies. Everywhere I went, my feminist attitude also accompanied me – in fact it rapidly grew on me. I would be enraged on hearing about dowries that my own well-educated male colleagues would ask. Soon, I was to discover that even an IT professional like me could help resolve not just problems relating to women, but also those of poverty and environment. I was shocked at first when I realized that my carefree lifestyle leaves adverse effect on society and ecology, also came at a huge cost to the poor. Partly, some of this enlightenment was thanks to my discussions with a volunteer group called Bharat Uday Mission in Pune (where I was working with Wipro).

Incidentally this was also the time I got in touch with Pulkit - my husband (who at the time had just been introduced to me by my persistent parents as a marital candidate!), who had already had a stint at social change. After co-founding 'Asha Kiran' – a community work wing of IIIT Hyderabad during his studies there, he had been working with HP Labs in Bangalore, volunteering as well as upholding green and ethical lifestyle. We got into a lot of interesting discussions, which kept us chatting and talking for hours. We were soon convinced that our frequencies matched well enough for to become partners for life. Since mine was a transferable job, I shifted to Bangalore with him, post marriage.

Bangalore introduced me to AID – Association for India's Development – a voluntary group started by a few (then) PhD students in the US which now has a number of chapters in US, UK, Australia and 9 chapters in India. Though I can't claim that I took part in many activities of AID in Bangalore, but it gave me a platform to connect with other groups, with whom I began volunteering in my part-time capacity. One such initiative was the awareness generation campaign against genetically modified food¹, where I could contribute actively during my stay in Karnataka. Even before my involvement with any of these, I had always believed that while it was important and natural to work on urban issues, the biggest need and scope for impact lied in rural India. That belief grew stronger with time, increasingly diverting my inclination towards problems of rural areas, esp. on agriculture, health, land and livelihoods.

Consequently, my interest in the office work was rapidly reducing, I was always more keen to do volunteering, even if it had to be through internet during office hours. So, I had to get out of the shackling job, and spend those 12 hours a day towards social change². I and Pulkit did consider financial implications (when he too is contemplating of going full-time in coming years), but as Gandhi rightly said, 'there's enough

¹Please visit <http://www.indiagminfo.org/>

²<http://sejswirlpool.wordpress.com/2010/03/15/a-defining-career-switch/>

for everyone's need but not for the greed'. We had begun doing away with our greed long ago, so there's a hope of finding comfortable sustenance to meet our 'needs' in future.

"Problems are interconnected and so must be the solution" – as a true believer of this, never could I be actively involved into volunteering for any of the educational initiatives run by AID volunteers in Bangalore or Delhi, albeit I value the need for betterment in education, for not only I find myself incapable of teaching kids and second, but also, it seemed more like wiping only the surface and not addressing the root causes. Having said that, I don't at all meant to undervalue the efforts of AID volunteers in teaching kids and trying to admit them in the mainstream schools, for that's one of the direct and significant change making processes that a part time volunteer can get involved with. Of course wiping the surface too is equally important, but I wanted to touch the root cause too. Over 3 years with AID introduced me to a variety of people. While some were passionate do-gooders working across country and really committed volunteers who struggled to take time out of their jobs and studies to change the society in whatever way they can; there were also those who were merely arm chair philosophizes and volunteers who wanted to have a feel-good effect to wash off their bad deeds. I've personally taken learning from both, positives of the former and negatives of the later.

It all begins at home!

My whole life changed drastically ever since the bug of volunteering for social causes bit me. I had been an idealist to a tiny extent, in the sense that I used to take what good things taught in my text books very seriously. Dowry was always an evil for me and I almost thought that my generation would think very differently, hence those male colleagues who boasted about asking dowry in their marriage totally lost respect in my eyes. In a matter of 2 years, such small stances expanded to the broader aspects of gender equity, and subsequently to social equity at large.

"How agonized we are about how people die. How untroubled we are by how they live!" - This speech³ by P Sainath had quite an impact on me. The famous story of Nero's guests that he mentions made me determined to spoil Nero's party. I realized how unaware I was about a lot of damages that I indirectly inflict upon fellow humans and how carefree I was in my own lifestyle. I realized how the environment is not a matter of mere academic debate relating to a distant future; scores of people are losing lives due to it and many more becoming displaced/water-starved/asthma-stricken. Yes, we all live with many contradictions, but what matters is, the openness and the courage to reduce these contradictions wherever possible. That's the first (still ongoing) task I undertook.

I and Pulkit (who had already started changing his lifestyle by buying a bicycle instead of a motor-bike) would have long discussions and debate on many of the changes that we thought we should do in our lifestyle. It started out with our marriage⁴ wherein we diverted the money we would have otherwise spent on a plush wedding to donations towards social change. Despite considerable opposition, we ensured a simple 3-hour affair involving some 30 odd close people in an Arya Samaj temple (Although both of us are atheists, we relented to that one wish of the parents). Post marriage, both of us always consciously attempted to change our consumption patterns and habits/choices in daily living⁵. For instance, we began buying maximally from small vendors as opposed to big shops or malls. We made a number of non-glamorous but effective changes aimed at ecological preservation. It ranged from minimizing water usage in daily chores to severely curbing disposables to refusing an AC/air cooler to avoiding flights. A friend had asked me once, what it is that I think is the most critical thing to do for a green lifestyle. My answer to that was a fundamental change in attitude. Just like most of us never have difficulty in ensuring that we don't spend beyond our economic wellbeing, we

³ Globalizing Inequality - <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1560557294503313321#>

⁴ <http://pulzinponderland.wordpress.com/a-glimpse-into-my-marriage-rich-in-photos/>

⁵ <http://stimulating-videos.ideagutter.com/>

should push ourselves to a consciousness where we try not to act against our collective ecological wellbeing. A quote I read somewhere said "I've never stopped being optimistic about goodness in all the human-kind". And indeed, everyone has a soft-corner that once found, one can surely be sensitive about sufferings of the fellow human-beings. A lot of volunteers (including me) I know, have undergone tremendous change in the way they see things. Sometimes it's only a matter of awareness as not many from middle or upper class even know where their food comes from or what happens to the enormous waste they generate. Perhaps they never questioned that, but after being exposed to the reality a lot of people do get disturbed and concerned.

6

How I landed up with CHLP

I came to know of Community Health Cell through Prasanna Saligram, who used to work with CHC before he left for his post-graduation. During the AID India Conference in Bangalore that we had organized, I heard Dr. Ravi and Thelma and was profoundly inspired by their stories. I also met Sudha (an AID US volunteer) during the same period undergoing CHLP. Talks with Sudha also made me visit Jagruta Mahila Sangathana (JMS) and have some discussions with Premdas. Moreover the IPHU (International People's Health University) also introduced me to a lot of JSA members and CHC staff. So when I was thinking about my paradigm shift and felt the need for a platform to guide me so that my learning curve remains steep esp. during the early months, it didn't take me much time to decide that I should apply for the next Community Health Learning Program.

Overview and acknowledgments

When I left my telecom job in February 2010, I had only vague idea of how my next one year will look like. These 9 months spent with CHC and with other groups and individuals have helped me develop a lot of perspectives that I hadn't anticipated. I can't be certain if it has given me enough clarity on my own roadmap, like I thought it would. In fact, it has pointed to more questions. But then I'm glad to find these questions bothering me, because it means I am constantly evolving and hunting for greater impact.

Post the Bangalore based initial sessions; I chose food security and rural livelihoods (esp. through the NREGA) as core components to focus on. My field journey began with the Right to Food campaign where the company of veterans provided invaluable learning each day. One of them is Madhuri Krishnaswamy, who's with Jagril Adivasi Dalit Sangathan(JADS) in Barwani. From the day I met her, I was deeply impressed by the clarity of thoughts and level of simplicity with which she was carrying herself. Even though I didn't have full idea of the work of JADS, I instantly decided to spend some days with her, a decision which I couldn't be more glad about. It was those few weeks I spent with Madhuri and adivasis of JADS in Barwani, which have made me pick Barwani as a location where a good chunk of my foreseeable future will be spent! From December, the plan is to divide my time between Barwani and Delhi/Noida.



The experiences of staying in the huts of people in rural and tribal regions of some of the most backward districts of MP and Bihar were the first of their kind. During last 9 months I learnt a good deal about tribal and rural lifestyle and tried to get acquainted to it. It was, of course, strenuous for me, having been a city dweller all my life. Walking long distances and climbing hills to reach one village to another, cycling more than 40 kms on bumpy and flooded road (with an ordinary bicycle), walking barefoot through flooded fields, sleeping in a hut and getting soaked in the middle of the night due to leaking roof, helping tribal women with de-weeding in the fields— all such tiny experiences were pretty new for me. But each one of them gave me more strength and encouragement to go to the next phase. I've intensely travelled across India in this phase, from Gujarat to

⁶ <http://sejswirlpool.wordpress.com/2009/05/09/slow-death/>

Rajasthan to MP to Orissa to Bihar to Karnataka, all of them by non-AC trains. *One thing that makes me glad is that I could manage to avoid buying bottled water (disposables) in all the journeys till date!* I've also tried almost all modes of transportation – trains, buses, trucks, tractor, bicycle (also sitting on the backside carrier of the bicycle), jeeps(almost packed with 30-40 people), etc. (avoiding the fuel guzzling flights).

Due to my prior interest in the areas of agriculture, I had decided to set on this journey keeping food security, livelihoods and rural employment (NREGA) as core components to focus on. And nothing seemed more appropriate than getting involved in the matters relating to National Food Security Act, with the Right to food campaign. As I write this post after 9 months of travel involving tribal, rural and urban areas of Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa and Delhi – I've come to the strong belief that everything finally boils down to high levels of corruption, flawed priority of the government budgeting (prioritizing business interests over social welfare) and fight over natural resources (land, water, trees and minerals).

I thank Kavita, Anuradha, Jean, Biraj, Vandana, Arundhati and Dipa for provided me the needed guidance which somewhere also helped me understand the campaign as a people's movement. Kavita, especially has been a great source of inspiration, for the endless reservoir of energy she possesses! I also found good friends in some of the young members like Deepika, Shreya, Trilochan , Pappu, Ashish, Prashant and Rolly!

Dr. Thelma, who was my mentor at CHC has been tremendously supportive throughout this journey in every sense and I thank her for all her mentoring and careful guidance in each decision that I took. I also thank Prasanna who also acted as a mentor of sort, besides being a good friend, providing me any logistical help that I needed☺. I also thank all the CHC members- Dr. Ravi, Premdas, Ruth, Rakhal, Joyce, Swami, Sukanya, Maria, Mangla, Pushpa and James – without whom this fellowship wouldn't have been on the right track. Needless to mention the tremendous contribution of all my co-fellows whose rich experiences brought me a good learning.

The Sangathan of Bargi dam displaced people helped me gave me a firsthand look into issues with the mass displacement of people. I thank their Karyakartas and Rajkumarji for this. Sunilji from Kisan Aadivasi Sangathan will always be an inspiration for me for the kind of lifestyle he leads. The visit to Mozda collective gave me a peep into lives of tribals in Gujarat. I am thankful to Michel Mazgaonkar for hosting me at their eco-friendly hut in the woods.

The decision to spend some time with Jan Jagaran Shakti Sangathan in Araria, Bihar gave me a whole different way to see things. I realized the importance of knowing the historical perspectives to understand reasons behind certain situations. Since then I've been exploring answers to some of the questions that have been bothering me about the state of Bihar. Stay in villages of Araria provided me with some insights of the society divided into various castes and fragmented because of attempts of politicization by different parties. The intriguing discussions with Kamayni Swami compelled me to make a comparison of the different Sangathans that I visited. I'm thankful to her for facilitating many informal chit-chats on different topics.

Lastly but most importantly, having Pulkit to share life with was one of the best decisions taken and I truly cherish the endless debates that have only made me think constructively and question myself. He has always been the first person who I would turn to in any difficulties or problems.

My personal involvement with the Right to Food Campaign

Right to food Campaign began in early 21st Century, during the years of drought and hunger, when PUCL filed a writ petition demanding a just distribution of food grains to the hungry that were overloading the godowns during that time. Filed in April 2001, the petition argued that the right to food follows from the fundamental

"right to life" enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution as it is impossible to live without food. It also demanded that massive food stocks (about 50 million tonnes of grain at that time) should be immediately used to prevent hunger and starvation. Going further in the demands for the relief work in drought affected areas the petition asked to (a) provide immediate open-ended employment in drought-affected villages, (b) provide unconditional support to persons unable to work, (c) raise the PDS entitlement per family, and (d) provide subsidised food grain to all families. The case resulted into some landmark judgements passed by the Supreme Court, in terms of regular interim orders related to the implementation of many schemes (such as PDS, ICDS, Mid-day meal, old age pension) under the case, after converting them as legal entitlements. This petition 196, PUCL vs Union of India is famously termed as the Right to Food case now. This PIL was the pioneering stone for the Right to food campaign, which has now grown strongly as a movement. The initial petition focused on the drought situation prevailing at that time, especially in Rajasthan, but later on, the case has been focusing on the larger issue of starvation and malnutrition for all the states in the country. Time and again, 'interim applications' have been filed resulting into 'interim orders', directing central and state governments to take necessary steps. The Supreme Court has also appointed commissioners for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the interim orders. At present Dr. N. C. Saxena is the commissioner and Harsh Mander is the special commissioner, both of whom now have been appointed as members of National Advisory Council headed by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi. The commissioners in turn appoint advisors in each state to assist their work. Many groups and individuals who came together at that time for the case also kicked off the campaign, which is Right to food Campaign⁷. The campaign's present focus is on the comprehensive National Food Security Act.

I had no idea what I was going to contribute to the campaign, but I had been following its websites and e-mail updates related to National Food Security Act. I also roughly went through the copy of the act drafted by the campaign⁸ to get better understanding. All I knew was about a dharna that was being organized in Delhi for the demands of a better food security act and I volunteered for the same. Trishna, a student volunteer, who was so valiantly fighting multiple tasks before dharna, was delighted to find another volunteer, and all happened so suddenly that within a day's time I found myself too running around for different things.

Dharna against proposed National Food Security Bill

A five day Dharna was organized by Right to Food campaign against the proposed National Food Security Bill, 2010. The event spanned from 15th April to 19th April, culminating in a panel discussion with various political leaders and a member of planning commission. The protests demanded the food and nutritional security for all the citizens of the country rather than targeting it only to BPL category of people which has brought the country today to a nutritional crisis⁹.



More than 2500 people from 19th states, coming from 200 various groups took part in the event, on different days. The dharna took place at a footpath place on Jantar Mantar road, where mikes and speakers were also arranged for people to come up and share their concerns and views. Almost everyone who protested spoke about issues faced by them in their states and villages and what is wrong with the current food security bill and what they see as solutions. People used folk songs, puppets etc to voice their opinions and problems. The upcoming CWG had

⁷ See campaign website – www.righttofoodindia.org

⁸ Campaign draft act - <http://rtf->

updates.googlegroups.com/web/rtf_act_draft_charter_sept09.pdf?gda=OQz14IIAABqHd9MXEcoroDeMVwct2Jx-Cs45PpREkyMnb8-W_c5mXQB-objfVh5UDefrNBDSux6oQYlae-

u_oV7Sr2kRBCWIVeLt2mulgCMmECKmxvZ2j4leqPHHCwbz-gobneSjMyE

⁹ Photographs - <http://picasaweb.google.com/righttofood/Dharna1519April#>

denied the citizens rights to voice their dissenting opinions and the time for dharna was hence limited from 9am to 5pm, which made it necessary for us to plan for accommodation for all the outstation participants.

Different ways were being thought out for registering protests. One of the days all went near the parliament and burnt the effigy of the NFSA. In spite of the court arrest, all of us gave speeches and kept chanting slogans inside dharna. One of them was "Sarkar hamese darti hai, police ko aage karti hai" (The government is scared of us and keeps police forward). I went ahead and distributed parchas to the staff at police commissioners' office and with a few interactions with the staff I learnt that that although most of them agreed with our demands, they were duty bound and were not able to support. On the third day, the police had become quite alert and it took some bit of fooling around to get to the planning commission. Approximately 35 of protesters could get away from the attentive police staff and stayed outside the planning commission asking for dialogues with members when the meeting to decide the poverty estimate was taking place. After making some noise over it, we could get Mr. Abijit Sen and Ms. Sayeda Hameed to come out till the gate, talk to the protesters accept the memorandum from us to discuss during their meeting. The campaign had become so well-known around jantar manter that in the end of the 5 days time, most police officers knew major campaigners and some of them also helped us in carrying out rally and human chain with more than 600 people on fourth day.

On the 5th day, the event culminated with a Panel discussion that consisted of political leaders voicing their opinions. Anuradha and Madhuri presented the major points concerning the proposed food security act and showed how the universalization is feasible with proper calculations on the food grains and budgetary allocations for a universalized PDS. (Please refer to Annex I for the details of the presentation.¹⁰) Different campaign delegations met with Mr. Sharad Pawar, Mr. Arun jaitley, Mr. Rajanath Singh and Mr. Lalu Yadav. It brings laughter on my face when I picture Sharad Pawar's face described by some of the campaign members when Kavita told him "Aap ko APL-BPL ki kya padi, aap to sirf IPL ka sochte ho!" Later I also helped with preparing the report for the entire Dharna¹¹.

Personal Reflections

In two days time, I got introduced to a number of the people active in Delhi for Right to food. Though I had been staying in NCR for last 7 months, never did I anticipate so many active groups working on issues of food in Delhi itself. Anyhow, what matters the most is that one by one the tasks were taken up and shared properly and things were made to happen as planned.

A lot of women from different parts of Delhi and other states came on the first day. Many were from Rajasthan who added a unique flavour. The dharna was a lot different than I had imagined it to be. I had been wondering what will people do sitting at one place, most of whom will be on fast! But the presence of mike could keep everyone alive. A lot of innovative songs, the one especially from Rajasthan were indeed thought-provoking. Rajasthani women added a unique flavour, with their courageous tone and puppet shows. The event also had a byproduct of spreading awareness on the larger picture of food security in the country. But the most stimulating factor was the tales shared by people from diverse parts of the country. People from many small sangathans came forward to voice their opinions.

During the initial days, seeing so many people flowing in at the dharna place, I even wondered if all of them knew why they had come at the first place. But soon as I started talking to the women, and hearing them

¹⁰ National Food Security Act Primer - http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/national_food_security_act_primer.pdf

¹¹ Most of the above excerpts have been taken from the report that I had helped with and it can be found at: http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/report_of_dharna_cum_relay_fast_organised_by_rtfc_15th_to_19th_apri_new_delhi.pdf

speak, I was ensured that a lot of them not only knew why they were, but they had courage to face the worst when they decided to pitch in with their time. It may have been comparatively easy for people like me to arrange the events like this, but for them, besides traveling and other costs; it also compromised their 5-6 days wages. I compared their such trip to my trips, where I usually plan where to stay, how to travel and reach the place, but that wasn't the case with many of the rural folks, who didn't even know where they would be put up for next 5 days, what they will eat and how they will go back to their villages. This gave me all the more reasons to be active in all the arrangements as it was the least I could do for their selfless contribution.

One important observation to make here is the dominance of the women in the crowd. In general also, women are seen to be more participatory in any struggle and always more empowered and sensitized about the injustices surrounding them and keen to work towards solutions. Perhaps, it's also driven by the fact that they are more downtrodden and abused section of the society and women labourers again come under the lower than the lowest strata of the society. Naturally, they will be more inclined to fight for their justice their male counter-parts in similar strata.

When I was asked to volunteer for secretariat coordination for 2 months, I took it as a means of learning on the job and kick-started with the tasks, beginning preparations for the dharna. Till date I don't regret that decision, that made me feel as a part of the campaign and I took upon myself to see that I do what was required for the good of the campaign. The passionate association with the campaign stays same today also and I believe it will only grow further.

Public hearing for starvation deaths – Gaya, Bihar

For me, the journey to Gaya from Delhi will stand memorable, as it was the first of its kind where I travelled without any ticket by train and as if that wasn't enough the train was late by some 14 hours! The public hearing too was very good learning for me, as it gave me firsthand view of the discussions I witnessed at the consultation held by JNU earlier in the month. [The full details of the public hearing is already there in the different report [Annexure I], hence I'll only capture my personal observations here.] I can't obviously judge the situation of the state with one public hearing, but whatever I heard and talked to people around, things seemed pretty worse. The mid-day meal, which generally works better than the rest of the schemes, too had been failing in the district. According to Rupeshji, advisor to Supreme court commissioners in Bihar, a number of fact finding reports had been sent to the commissioners, which was also followed by visits of Harsh Mander a few years back and even after being given regular orders, the situation hadn't improved, and the public hearing which was held was the result of all those years of follow ups. Most of all the deaths that were reported were from those blocks where there was a complete failure of the social welfare schemes, including NREGA and health facilities. Moreover all the deaths were ruled out, as per ADM, as deaths due to illness or infection, based on post-mortem reports. Harsh Mander's presence made a big difference though. The administrative members kept pouring in, on his orders. CDPO, ADM, BDO and even DDC were there to face his questions. Promises were made, but no idea how much of it will translate into honest actions.

What makes me wonder is, why should it take an SC commissioner to visit the place for the district officers to be present in the hearing and to give assurances that things will be better? The presence of Harsh Mander or BHRC representatives did make a difference, but one can't expect them to be visiting every district to have equal presence from the administrative units. This indeed has made me thinking about where things should end, and what should be the role of civil society in the long run for any of the issues, be it health, food or education. Any new scheme or act is fought for, in the end, onus comes on to civil society to make sure it works better, be it PDS, ICDS, NRHM, NREGA, RTI, Acts for domestic violence, forest rights or the latest RTE. Agreed that some amount of questioning from outside is necessary and helps to strengthen system and ensure accountability, but that has today become such a huge task, keeping everyone too busy to think

anything out of the box. In my view, the role of any civil society group should be more on strengthening the policy-making than acting as watchdog. But as of now, I see the act of being a watchdog taking primary role and very few are actually getting bandwidth to go beyond that. With whatever reading and exposure that I've got, I fail to see any improvement in recent future to this, which feels very depressing at times. This has made me seriously deliberate on what should be the real solution to the present situation and whether I'm on the right track that's targeting at such solution or not.

NAC consults Right to Food campaign members at Delhi for National Food Security Act

A consultation of NAC with members of Right to food campaign was arranged to discuss food security bill. During the meeting Madhuri Krishnaswami from JADS started it off with detailed demands and understanding of food security act on behalf of the campaign. Each of the members then presented on various issues related to food security and problems of different sections such as children, vulnerable groups etc. There weren't too many comments from the NAC members and hence I couldn't really figure the effectiveness of the consultation¹². Thereafter working group of food security under NAC also came up with very poor final recommendation under the restrictions put up by the government. The right to food campaign strongly expressed disappointment for the same. Prof. Jean Dreze who has been also an NAC member publically stated his disagreement with these recommendations.

National Convention of Right to food & work

Imagine around 2500 people pouring in from all over the country at a single venue so that they can all be a part of the struggle of their right to food & work! It was a unique experience to see such a convention taking place and at the same time being also a volunteer for organizing many things for it. The fourth National convention of Right to food & Work this year was held in Rourkella, the steel city of Orissa. It took me longest to reach Rourkela and that entire trip also gave me good stint at night outs at Indian railway's waiting rooms! Rourkela as a venue brought more folks from Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa, highlighting Jal-Jungal-Jameen as one of the most fundamental issues relating to food security of the nation. I heard P.Sainath in person for the first time and that too in Hindi! A lot of other speakers made an interesting convention overall. Total of 22 workshop, each having approximately 300 participants passed quality resolutions¹³ in the end for each of the subject in relation to food security. These resolutions now have become an important reference for campaign demands.

Food security – the way I look at it

Food security is seen in many different ways, though there's no doubt that National Food Security Act should not have just one aspect of food security, which is food entitlement. In my view, a nation cannot be called food secured unless it is producing sufficient for its needs without overloading its farmers and every human being is able to get two nutritious meals a day. Any amount of grain, distributed at any subsidized rate, will provide just marginal relief unless the fundamental flaw - of unequal wages and that of farmer's distress is dealt with. By this, I don't mean to say that PDS is not required. In fact it's a tool if used effectively, can indirectly make a huge difference towards addressing agricultural crisis, as it ensures procurement at fair MSP from the farmers by the system and hence encourages good production. But fair MSP will not be the panacea of the agricultural crisis. The underlying issues with the current farming methods that are influenced by green revolution also needs a critical look. We also need to address future trading and export-import related problems. Rapid loss of agricultural land to the industrial areas, declining forest cover and the

¹² Please refer to the annexure for more information on the updates with NAC work related to NFSA

¹³ Resolution of the Rourkella Convention -

http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/resolution_fourth_national_convention_16_sept_2010.pdf

requirement of Land reforms are some of the things that need urgent attention in this decade. Some also argue that if farmers issues are well taken care of, we can as well dismantle PDS which is anyway almost non functional today. I find it a dangerous suggestion, not only because system won't have a motivation to procure from the farmers offering fair price for the produce, but I also find it difficult, without PDS, to ensure 'affordable' consumer price for essential food grains to 'every' human being in the country. For achieving fundamental right to live, it must be ensured that every person gets all the necessities required for living a dignified life. And food being one of the most essential necessities, it directly relates to the Right to dignified life. And a right cannot be different for me and for a person living in 5*5 shacks. But that's what is being done in the present system, targeting few individual and providing them subsidized food as a charity, not as their right. Such targeting also has gross inclusion and exclusion errors today. Universalization of PDS with proper accountability and transparency, along with effective agricultural and land reforms, in my view, looks to be a way forward for achieving the comprehensive food security act.

Sustainability of Sustainable agricultural method and present ways of promotion of organic food

With AID volunteers we also tried to have some interactive meetings with other AID JeevanSaathis working in Hyderabad. (A Jeevansaathi is an AID volunteer who leaves his/her present career for full time community work.) We had a good debate on issues related to agriculture with Kiran, from AID Hyderabad, who's involved with initiatives on sustainable agriculture in Andhra Pradesh. But unfortunately that debate couldn't come to a conclusive end, leaving me again with unanswered questions. I understand the catastrophic results of our green revolution, health hazards that pesticides are responsible for and reduction in soil fertility owing to extensive usage of fertilizers. Certainly we need to promote sustainable farming methods, which ends in reduction of input costs and resources required for the farming, provides healthy food and improves soil fertility. But I find the current methods of promoting organic food very objectionable. At present a lot of organic stores are trying to setup their own supply chain, removing middle man and promoting organic food to consumers as a healthy and better alternative. Clearly the target of such initiatives will be the elite of the cities. The idea behind this is to create more demand of organic food as elite. But that has now backfired in a way, as stores like Reliance Fresh, Namdhari etc have also chipped in with the same strategy. I actually see no difference between stores of non-profit organization stores and those of retail chains, in a way both operate. Both wants middle men out, branding them responsible for the price rise. Well, may be middle men are responsible for increase in consumer price, but is this the best way to bridge the gaps? Imagine one day we have most farmers going organic and then what would happen if someone attempted to scale these scattered initiatives and actually tried to bring organic food to the local shops? Will all the shop owners have luxury to have their own supply chain? I guess one would need to resort to the middle-men for procurement and transportation. Then why not think of this long term possibility and try to demand better supply chain options by the system?

Second issue that often comes in everybody's mind is the price of organic food. While discussing this matter with some of the people involved, it boils down to two reasons. One is lack of supply chain and second is attempts to give better prices to the farmers. Naturally, farmers do need better prices, but should that come at the cost of consumer price, is the question. I would prefer direct income subsidy to farmer than increasing consumer prices for food. Hence, somewhere I can't bring myself in agreement with the present models of promotion of organic food.

Our lives in our hands - Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan

JADS in Barwani, was perhaps the first community exposure of its kind where in I underwent the lifestyle in a rural ambiance for more than 4-5 days. Perhaps it was the first ever attempt at living with Adivasis in their

huts and try to get a feel of their culture and routine life. It provided me with experiences that will stay unforgettable forever. Barwani is a district near Maharashtra border and not too far from Gujarat border. So it has a mix of all the three states. It's also now famously known because of Sardar Sarovar Dam and parts of it being in the submergence area (and more will soon be). Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)¹⁴ is quite prominent in the town of Barwani.

Madhuri Krishnaswamy is a spunky social activist, who was born to an affluent family (her father retired as a top Indian Air Force official) and graduated from St. Stephen's (Delhi). Even while she was studying for her M.Phil (under a JNU professor), she had started wondering about the utility of the academic knowledge to the society. She soon made up her mind to strive to improve the quality of life for those living on the lowest fringe of the society. She has not been deterred by the frequent run-ins with the bureaucracy and the political leadership and many criminal cases have so far been slapped against her, at times when she tried to raise her voice for the issues relating to corruption, tribal atrocities or health rights. Sometimes the police would treat her like a major security threat. In late 90s, when she came to Bhopal to inform the media about the atrocities being committed on the tribals in the Sendhva area of Khargone district, soon after she had finished her press conference, she was picked up by the police and taken to Khargone to face charges under Sections 386 and 387 IPC (extortion by putting a person in fear of death or grievous hurt). However, her resolve to fight on remains rock solid.

Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS), started approximately 12 years back, before which it was a part of Adivasi Mukti Sangathan. Due to some of the internal problems with working style of its old leaders, people were repelled with the AMUS and that triggered JADS as a separate entity, initially with Pati and Bukhareta blocks. Now it's also active in Panchsemal and Barwani blocks. The Sangathan went on membership based model where each member contributes annual fees of Rs 60. Although it hasn't been collected for last 2 years, the majority of the expenses of the Sangathan are taken care of through the leftover corpus fund. There are a few members that are elected at village, block and zilla level as karyakartas by people themselves. Most important part of the Sangathan is, all of these karyakartas are local and none of them are being paid as of now and all the work is being done by members and people totally on volunteer basis. Although Madhuri and other karyakartas do understand the limitation of this model but they feel that people ultimately need to decide if they wish to pay any karyakarta to work fulltime for their Sangathan.

Due to the extensively craggy terrain, houses are quite scattered and it takes considerable time to reach from one house to the other in the same hamlet. Even when I had to reach Sawariya Parni from Kandra, it felt like literally trekking on some of the small hills at times. I was dumbfounded when Poitiram (a karyakarta who I accompanied) told me that they go over this terrain during the dark night without torch and sometimes with 50kgs of load on their back!

Majority of the details I've put down here have come to my knowledge through my interactions with people. I've attempted to find about most of the sangathan work through eyes of people who've struggled for years. Over the time, many accepted the positive changes in them. I met a lot of male workers who were proud to say that they left their drinking habits over years in Sangathan and now pursuing others in doing the same.

Jilla Meeting in Kandra

After reaching barwani and having an initial discussion with Madhuri about JADS and its work, I went to the Jilla meeting of the sangathan with her in Kandra village. The village under Kandra Gram Panchayat



¹⁴ NBA Recently completed 25 years of its struggle in Narmada Valley - <http://www.frontline.in/stories/20101119272302900.htm>

comes under Pati block. The terrain is pretty mountainous and hence houses are very much scattered. It takes a bit long to reach one house from another waling up and down the hills.

The marathon meeting that went on till two days was something that showed the commitment the adivasis had towards their causes and struggle, which kept them running irrespective of any situation. Be it burning heat or soaking rain, the meeting would go on, people would step up and put forth their concerns, issues for further discussion and the struggle would go on.

The kandra meeting witnessed a lot of discussions amongst people from different villages and blocks, who also shared their success and failure stories with each other. The meeting went non-stop till late night and half of the next day, most time without Madhuri. There also were some focused group discussions amongst men and women differently. On the second day, they discussed the next strategy for the sangathan. Apart from inspiring commitment from people, I also observed good sense of discipline. Though illiterate, they knew how to conduct large meetings, sticking to their agenda, appointing some literate person to take notes and maintaining a bit of code of conduct during the discussions.

Village level Meetings

During the meeting in Kandra people had decided to revive the sangathan efforts with series of meetings in all the villages. A committee of 8-9 members was formed in each kshetra. Every day the meeting would be arranged in one village and all the members would go in there to witness it. I had then attended such meeting in Sawariya pani, Kandra and Bukreta villages. During these meetings people put their problems, sometimes even personal or family troubles, up for discussion. In all the meeting, discipline was once again exemplary. However intense the discussion goes, there won't be any sense of agitation in people. A lot of people during the meetings were bold enough to criticize the internal problems with sangathan too and all of them were taken in their right spirit. I was impressed by orating skills of many of them who did good job of motivating the rest of the crowd to stay united.



Azadi Siksha Kendra

The language that's spoken majorly is 'Barli', which to me sounds like a mix of Hindi-Marathi-Gujarati. The dialect changes with the region too. Panchsemal block, which is near to Maharashtra, has more Marathi in it. Even the clothing of adivasis was different, for those belonging to bukreta or panchsemal.

'Barli' being their native language, kids here always face problems in Government schools, where in they are taught in Hindi. Moreover in blocks like Pati and Bukreta, where several parts are too high on the hills, the geographical constraints are roadblocks for kids to reach to their schools. The sangathan thus, decided to build a school of their own in the lines of another school 'Aadharsheela' in Sendhwa block. The small hut of the school was built by adivasis themselves; hence it saved the labour cost. Two teachers from the community with nominal qualification had been identified, who are being paid from sangathan collection. The informal residential school tries to teach kids in Barli first then slowly get on to hindi so that they can gradually understand the teaching of government schools if and when they are admitted into one. At present, school has 40 kids residing inside it and the food for them is also being prepared by the family of one of the teacher, with the grains supplied by their parents. They have

also formed a school committee that takes care of all the problems and matters that concerns school. They have named it as 'Aazadi Siksha Kendra'.

Collection and Preservation of Native Seeds

The sangathan has also started initiative for collecting and preserving native seeds. As a result, there was a collection drive which yielded in numerous native seeds. With the help of seeds available from horticulture department, they also have plans to start kitchen gardens during monsoon. Somehow they still haven't been able to procure native cotton seeds, as most places I saw people growing Bt cotton, though they do understand the adverse consequences of it. Most time the reason explained by people was non availability of native seeds. Except cotton being grown by a few members who owns wells, most of the aadivasis grow makka and jowar for their own consumption.

Watersheds

Years ago, people themselves had taken up watershed programs in the villages which were extremely successful with shram-daan from villagers themselves. Being a hilly region, conservation of water and aforestation has become very important from them. Pati block, which used to be a densely forested area some 25 years back, now looks miserably de-forested. People do accept that a tiny percentage of it is also removed by themselves for their houses and agriculture, but most part of it is taken off by the forest department illegally for the industries. When it was raining everywhere in MP, hills of barwani stayed thirsty. People have understood the importance of forest, and hence there have been efforts to grow trees. Kids studying in the school have taken this as one of the assignment and more than 100 trees had been planted near the school itself. Other blocks too have done a tree plantation drive, some of it through NREGA too. JADS activists had played an important role in the struggle of NREGA, and people of barwani see NREGA as their right to livelihood and also a tool to develop their own village, their farms and land, water sources and forests. Almost everyone is an activist in itself when it comes to problems with NREGA. People now know their way out to the solutions, and strategies of struggle.

Forest Rights

Since these blocks are majority of forest areas with some patches of revenue land, people have been trying to get their land ownerships under Forests Rights Act (FRA) for a few years now. The land disputes between revenue and forest land are frequent and one question often raised is, that the dalits (who are actually aadivasi, but not recognized in government data) don't get the ownership of their land even when they have been living in forest area. I was surprised to find the extent of unity in people when I heard one aadivasi, who asked if there's any difference in their blood. If not, then why there is this differential treatment for both of the castes. Aadivasis, who have their houses in revenue land and farms in forest land, also face a lot of issues in getting ownership of their land and houses.

NREGA and PDS

JADS has been well-known for being first to obtain an unemployment allowance in the country. The level of awareness in here is one of the best known as people were equipped with all the ongoing matters of NREGA since the time it was going to be drafted. People are almost self-reliant here in fighting for their wages. In order to avoid the corruption with PDS shops, all the women go together to get their ration. The BPL list that was revised in a recent survey got many people out of the list. An application was made with signatures of all such people as per one of the Supreme Court orders and as a result, recently all those people got themselves

back on the BPL list. Aanganwadis do function there, but the difficult geography doesn't generally permit villagers to drop their kids to anganwadis on daily basis. Many do get take-home rations though.

Health

The health situation is troublesome in the area. It's not the case of awareness but the access to the services is difficult. Saathi, one of the NGO working in barwani, has taken up awareness generation for the health services in the sangathan people. Saathi started with training rural women as community health workers, calling them 'swasthya-saathi'. They were trained to handle approximately 12 diseases and earlier were using medicines supplied by LOCOST. With NRHM, many of them turned into ASHAs. Villagers don't find it favorable though. For them, now ASHAs have been loaded by NRHMs own agenda. Instead of 12, now they only take care of 6 diseases. Still they do provide significant health services to villagers. Other than that, SAATHI also tries to put health as an issue in the Sangathan's meetings. If needed people also arrange dharna and protests for addressing some of the issues. One such dharna they arranged for CHC in barwani where in Saathi had a doctor of their own sitting outside CHC, re-checking the patients coming out of it, to ensure they are diagnosed properly by the doctor inside it. Many men and women mentioned the role of sangathan in awareness generation that has resulted into smaller families in the later generations.

Gender and Bride Price

Adivasi, in general have the custom of Bride-price. Unlike how it works in Dowry, here the father of the groom has to give some gift or money to the bride's family. The amount in members of JADS used to be quite high, although after years of follow up and discussions amongst members facilitated by some sensitized karyakartas people have agreed to put a ceiling of Rs. 5000 on this. One might think of bride-price as a progressive step, for gender equality and women's empowerment, but with mainstreaming of tribals, and influences of outer world, this is only striking back on women. Women in some families after marriage are made to work more as money was 'invested' for them in the form of bride-price. Although the rigid forms of patriarchy and it's after effects such as male child preference, lack of education in girls etc are not prevalent here.

Aadharsheela – School in Chatli, Sendhwa

I also went to Aadarsheela, a school run by Jayashri and Amit in Sendhwa block. Basic concept was to educate kids who are coming from adivasi background, most of whom fail at understanding hindi at the first place with government schools. The school initially teaches kids in Barli, and then shifts to hindi gradually. The teaching is done through alternate education methods. The school that's been running for last 10 years, now is fairly developed with multiple classes, library and computer room etc. They also have their own garden to grow most of the vegetables. The running cost of the school is taken care of by the fees of kids and grains given by parents for their meals. Other than that, they do accept funds of the infrastructural expenses.

Valsinghbhai arrested

Towards the end of my stay, one of the oldest karyakarta Valsinghbhai was arrested¹⁵ on false charges or robbery. Soon after the news was spread, a meeting of major karyakartas was arranged in one of the village, and it was decided that protests will be held at 6 police stations¹⁶. People held individual block level meetings

¹⁵ To get more details, please refer to the appeal that was issued upon his arrest at annexure II

¹⁶ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article546185.ece> and <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article555755.ece>

too. I went to Bukhreta meeting, where most of the adivasis had walked over 2-3 hours in the morning to reach the place. People then decided to protest at 6 of the police stations asking for Valsingbhai's bail. The case was up for hearing in Sendhwa court soon. The SP that Madhuri met for the bail proudly told her stories of how he had killed people from both sides during some hindu-muslim riots so hence he was not worried as to how many people protest for this. Later the protests were held at places, but unfortunately I had to leave for the Rourkela convention before that. Madhuri had to give convention a miss due to this emergency. From what all feedback I had gathered from Madhuri and some journalists that I met later, I figured that more than 7000 adivasis had protests outside 6 police stations, which ended up in some charges against 1000 of them. Sendhwa court judge refused to grant bail anything by merely seeing the charges on Valsing. I was in Bhopal when Madhuri had come to appeal in Indore High Court. She had signature collected by people of Barwani in more than 500 A4 sized pages (filled on both sides) with heading 'arrest us' on the top of all. We felt it was essential to put the number of people who signed in there and we almost spent whole day numbering them and it came around 7500 people. Finally I had got the news from Madhuri and others that Valsingbhai got bail from Indore Court.

Urban groups & members/volunteers of AID (association of India's development)

At the meetings of AID, we had organized interactions with Pushpaji of Bhalaswa Lok Shakti , a group supported by AID (US) in Bhalaswa, a resettlement colony in the worst landfills on the outer periphery of Delhi. The people's struggles primarily are to fight displacement before eviction, and then once settled, for obtaining the basic necessities such as water and sanitation, ration shop supplies, schools etc.

Visit to Harola Basti at Sector 5, noida where Mobile Chreche works

Mobile Creches (<http://www.mobilecreches.org/>) has been involved with some ICDS related interventions in Delhi and one basti in Noida. I happened to visit their Noida basti where in they have been working since 2004. Gangaben, who's supposedly the community leader and Krishnaji, who is the supervisor from Mobile Creches, showed me around. They had started their efforts in 2004, with awareness generation using puppets, street theatre, songs etc, related to child care, after which a few interested women gathered for the child care training. Some 5 balwadis were setup after that with those trained women and in parallel they started exploring the possibilities of anganwadi setup by the Noida authority. The women's group in the community went to Noida authority who registered an application demanding anganwadis in their basti. After one year of consistent follow up, at present, they have 3 anganwadis and one balwadi (by MC), in the basti. The women, who were trained by MC, become AWW later on. However due to more number of kids, they still required a balwadi, for which they were charging nominal fees for one kid. The awareness levels have increased in the community, as Krishna mentions, basti women had started questioning her for these fees as nothing's charged by the government for anganwadis!

Slums of Noida Sector 16

AID volunteers in Noida have been running an education center where they try to get the drop-out students back to school after teaching them for some time. The slum area, often called as Juggi Jhopadi in Noida, is situated along side Sahadara sewage line coming from delhi inside Noida. Some of the present residents say that the land was earlier in Delhi some 30 years back and later moved inside UP. To some, it's still a disputed area since the sewage is under Delhi flood control department. The ration cards and other residential proofs, however, have Noida Sector 16 as its address. I keep going to these slums with Pulkit whenever I'm in Delhi and converse with people there. Almost all of these are migrant, majority from Bihar. But all of them have local ration cards. These ration card is of different nature, that has 'Pradhikaran Patra' written on it, with a

note that they are only valid for 3 months. I tried to find more information about this type of cards, but in vein. Finally I sent an RTI applications to DSO (District Supply Officer) and still awaiting its response. I had also make an application for "Anganwadi on demand", which yielded in no response. Follow up on this is in my list of pending items when I go back to Noida.

Celebration of 20 years of MKSS struggle on May-Day at Bhim

I didn't have to think twice before nodding in approval upon listening to Kavita's suggestion to visit Bhim on May Day, where MKSS was to organize a celebration of their 20 years of struggle. After an eventful journey in a jeep packed to the rafters (actually much more!), I reached the mela-ground in Bhim, overflowing with a massive gathering of over 7000 villagers from across Rajasthan (along with many others having assembled from various parts of India). People from different villages poured in with the banners of their unions and were cheered on their arrival by the vociferous crowd, chanting slogans. The day was filled with tales from the illustrious journey of MKSS, the singing of legendary songs (on all sorts of issues) authored by Shankar Singh, puppet shows and experience sharing by other veteran activists. The ground was surrounded by a variety of stalls that sold books, art-works, clothes, food items, etc., apart from providing services for assisting with RTI applications.

It was quite inspiring to listen to people like Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Kavita Srivastava, Harsh Mander, Shankar Singh and many other stalwarts, sharing their tales of endless struggle and many success stories. More intriguing were the experience sharings by the villagers who have been working with them for 20 years. Aruna introduced some of the old ladies, who, supposedly have been well-known story-tellers and have even given a taste of her tongue to some of the District officers. Amongst all the fascinating stories, one of them was of Lalsinghji from Soham Garh who met Arunaji in 1987, after being thrown out of his job in police force for attempting to unionize people there! He expressed that his desire to generate union of people was fulfilled at MKSS :-).

Seeing such an overwhelming crowd I took the opportunity to spend some time interacting with the villagers that had gathered. Sitadevi, a woman from Kishangarh, Ajmer had instantly come up with very impressive folk song, the moment I told her that I come from Ahmedabad and live in Delhi! The problems that were discussed were mainly of NREGA wages. Almost every woman complained that they were being paid shabby Rs 30/- of wage for the working under scorching sun with hot sand. Unemployment allowance is a distant dream for some of them. One can only imagine the consequences of working in the heat of Rajasthan with no water being provided at worksite and not enough food is affordable to meet the nutritional requirements to perform such type of work. Most heart-wrenching for me was the innocent yet profound question by Sitadevi as it simply put in her own words "I and my husband are more than 50 years old, and barely able to work in the field, have no land of our own and no kids. Still we are denied of BPL card. Can you help us getting it?" I wish I could have a definite answer for her and I also wish our shameless politicians and administrators who are currently discussing about definition of 'poor' and how best to exclude them by limiting quotas, can hear Sitadevi and more people like her.

During the same period, like it happens in any big gathering, I was approached by a few kids who beg for food. Generally I try not to go for short-cuts by offering something, for if given something to one, I know, the rest will follow. This time I made an exception, but as expected, 3 more kids came running to me. I now bought two dishes of pur-bhaji and asked all the 4 kids to share. Shockingly, one of them flinched, said he wouldn't eat with the other three! Though the reason became evident to me, still I asked why and here came the dreaded answer "Main Thakur hun, aur vo log nichhi jaat ke hai" [I am Thakur, and those people are from lower caste]. Until this point, I'd only heard about level of castism in kids but now an example of it was in front of me. With all the debates over castism around, only logical conclusion that I can draw is that even though one can erase today's caste based fundamentalism and start all over again, the society will still have

some people who would be working as manual scavengers, cobblers, etc and some will be white-collarists. If the basic dignity of work is not maintained, we will again end up with the discrimination – if not of a caste, then of a class - so the real solution seems to provide dignified wages to any type of work so that every human being is able to live life of basic comfort and dignity. That sounds the ultimate path to equity for me. But when I asked the profession of these kids' parents, all of them were daily wagers, the caste discrimination here didn't seem to depend on the type of work. I still don't go back to re-think, but now I do agree that even before getting such a system that I envisaged, we need to erase the current system, where the discriminatory thoughts are so deep-rooted and that has also been brainwashing little kids, the youngest generation we have that can make an impactful change if addressed today.

Just as I had observed in the Delhi Darna, here too, the overall crowd contained more women than men, for we all know, that women are the least paid workers irrespective of their castes or class.

Aruna mentioned that they had also sent the demand of increasing NREGA wages as per inflated rates in Rajasthan. The signatures were taken for the appeal and the demands will be sent again. Some of the demands that were mentioned are¹⁷:

- Payment of at least the minimum and full wages to all.
- Those who've finished their work should be free to go to their homes (specially in the summer when sun is at its peak in Rajasthan)
- The minimum wages have been at Rs. 100/- for last two years without accounting the inflation thereafter. The demand was made to take inflation into account and increase the wages periodically.
- Job card should be issued when demanded and should be in the name of each eligible individual in the family as opposed to one job card for the whole family.
- Mobile phones are now easily available in the rural areas hence the demand was raised for a toll free calling service for immediate resolution of the issues.
- Old age pension included with NREGA wages: The suggestion was to cut Rs. 5 from the wages and match it with equal or double amount and deposited it in the pension fund for that person which can be utilized in the old age.

*“Har hath ko kaam mile,
kaam ka pura daam mile
aur bhdhaye mein aaram mile”*

Sangathan of People Displaced by Bargi Dam and Kisaan Adivasi Sangathan

From Rourkela, I went to Bargi, a place in Jabalpur district to know more about the sangathan of people who were displaced by Bargi dam. I felt the need to understand this a little more from those who are displaced by dams rather than just reading from various sources. I stayed in Bargi, and visited the villages of the Sangathan for a week.

Bargi comes under Jabalpur district and is 2 hours away from the Jabalpur city. From Rourkela, I had to go to Jabalpur via Bilaspur. Only 5 hours of train journey from Rourkela to Bilaspur showed glimpses of destruction that can happen due to mining and industrialization, and explains the issues with Orissa and Chattisgarh. Just from the small window of the train, I saw plenty of coal loading sites, numerous big ash mountains and more than 6 big industrial plants, grossly polluting the land & water in the surroundings as well as air.

After reaching Rajkumarji's house in Bargi I first studied the report of Human cost of Bargi dam. Bargi was the first dam built as series of Narmada Dam projects. The work that was conceptualized in 1968 was started in 1974 and completed in 1990, making it 20 years at present for the dam. Initial plan states that expected

¹⁷ In the months of October-November 2010, MKSS and other allies in Rajasthan also kicked off Mazdoor Huq Yatra and Satyagrah with these and many other demands (primarily for NREGA wages) – Please refer to <http://srabhiyan.wordpress.com/> for more info.

irrigation should be 2.98 lac Ha but today after 20 years, It provides irrigation to little over 9000 Ha of land. The work of two left and right main canals are not even completed, let alone sub canals. The total cost was estimated initially as 69 Crores and was escalated to 566.31 crores in 1989, excluding canal cost (1665.60cr). The 26797 ha reservoir of the dam ended up displacing more than 7000 Families (over 35000 people approx.) from 162 villages of Mandla, Jabalpur and Seoni districts (out of which 82 villages were completely submerged and 8478 Ha or forest land was gone). Most of the displaced were forced to dwell in slums of Jabalpur, some have gone to Patan Tehsil of Jabalpur, Gotegaon in Narsinhpur and even to Baigachak districts in search of work after losing their land. Many people have been displaced multiple times due to miscalculations. A few hills have become islands and some people are still staying there and commuting with boats. The compensation for private land was meager and wasn't even given to most of them. Even those who had money to buy a tiny piece of land couldn't buy as land prices due to dam were suddenly escalated. The refugees of the peripheral forest land were fined and harassed by the forest departments. I was accompanied to the dam by one of the Sangathan karyakarta and was mesmerized seeing the size of the reservoir, which enabled me to imagine what a massive destruction would it have been. Later next day I also visited to villages of Jabalpur and met a few members of fishermen co-operative that was formed by sangathan to help generate livelihoods for some of the displaced.

The wrong estimations by the irrigation department had also resulted into over-acquisition of the land. Over 150 acre of land was stayed unused after being acquired and hasn't given back to people who owned it. Some of them have anyway started cultivation there even after a lot of threats by the concerned officials, but people say that this land will be used for the garden by tourism department. People are also hearing about plans of a national park on the reservoir, which will again displace them.

With Shardaji, another sangathan karyakarta, I went to villages of Mandla district, which has witnessed highest amount of displacement. It took 4 hours to reach Tatighat village (Narayanganj Vikaskhand). The direct route length to this place from bargi is approx. 35 kms, but due to the dam reservoir, it has now increased to 100 kms. I had some informative discussions with Shardaji enroute, where he explained me about his initiatives of organic farming in Mandla district. After getting training for a few farmers from a place in Maharashtra, they had converted to organic farming and this is now 5th year for some 40 farmers in Mandla district.

A lot of the farmers in Mandla whose land was gone in the dam had settled and started using some unoccupied land in the uphill areas and today they have been able to get the ownership under forest rights act. It seems they did cut the forest for agriculture, but again Shardaji mentions, they were careful enough in not cutting bigger trees. One quarter in a year, when the water level of the dam goes down, some of the land that is freed of water is used by villagers for farming. People have also worked out a plan for getting ownership of this land for farming, with cap on the maximum allotment of 7 acre for those who used to own big chunk of land in that area, hence ensuring equitable distribution for everyone. But this also ends up hurting some of the ex-big farmers, often generated into internal frictions or even violence. There have even been incidents of such disputes getting till court and still staying unresolved. The hemlets that were formed of displaced people after dam had a lot of challenges for people who started living there. It took lot many years of struggle to get basic facilities such as health, schools, anganwadis, roads, water, electricity, ration shop etc. A lot of villages are still not recognized as forest or revenue villages and things like NREGA hasn't begun there yet. Tatighat was one of the many villages that didn't have electricity for a long time. But due to efforts by people of Tatighat they could get free solar panels for themselves. Today also they are able to run most of their electricity needs through these solar panels, even when they have grid connection.

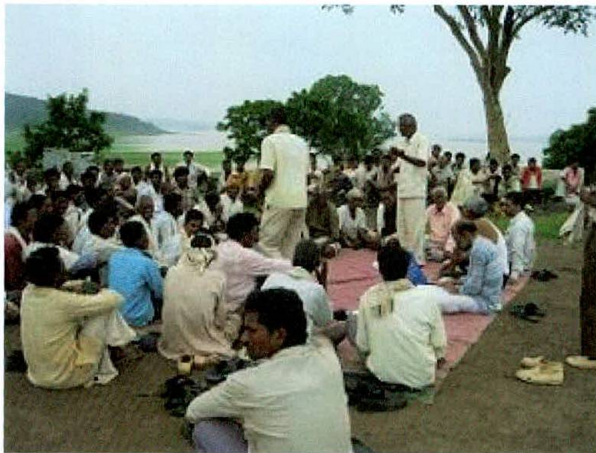
Chutka Parmanu Sangarsh Samiti

300 families from Chutka, a village in Mandla will be displaced for the 3rd time now. First due to the dam reservoir, then because of the wrong estimation of the submergence area and now for the third time when

Madhya Pradesh will have its first nuclear plant on the banks of this reservoir. The promises are made to the villagers for electricity, but government can't answer that why even after having two hydel power plant units on the Bargi dam, people get hardly 1-2 hours of electricity in the day (Many villages aren't even getting that much). The Chutka Parmanu Sangarsh Samiti that was formed by people struggling against the power plants since its conceptualization. People did not let the survey happen for the initial few times. The last time they found a few people secretly conducting survey for the reservoir land, they got suspicious and snatched their bags asking them to go to their seniors and get them to have a dialogue. The district collector too had gone to the people and did a meeting with them, where in one of the female member simply told them that people are ready to give in writing that they have been doing okay without electricity and they don't want electricity for next 100 years. So please stop the plant now. During the meeting one female commented "Why don't they make the plant on the banks of big lake of Bhopal, that too has a lot of water. But they wouldn't want to spoil health of city dwellers, we villagers are the only guinea pigs." I did study some of the press reports of the nuclear plant. The nuclear power corporation document favoring nuclear power plants has an interesting line in it. About Chernobyl nuclear disaster, it does accept that the impact on health, human lives and environment was huge, but it also foolishly adds "Even this accident involving massive release of radiation did not result anywhere comparable to an atomic explosion." – So, according to NPCL, one should only object when the disaster is as huge as an atomic explosion! I also heard some of them wooing villagers about benefits of power plant in their own lives and bitching about Rajkumarji outside the meeting. The new Tehsildar though seemed cooperative, when he was sitting in the meeting, busy taking notes.



Barela Thermal Power Plant



Another thermal power plant that's already under construction is in Barela in Jabalpur District. We had a visit to the power plant site where the work was going on. The Sangathan hasn't been able to stick its feet here as the village is not one of the displaced. A few of us went and talked to the villagers and got to know some details on the scenario. The Jhabua Power Limited Company that is building the plant (2 units of 600MW each), had declared 5 lac per acre as compensation for the private land. Since the area was mostly agriculture and not residential, there has not been any displacement. People did protest initially but later took the compensation. Now, due to lack of awareness and

literacy, a lot of them were cheated on the compensation and were given only 50000 or 70000 per acre. The tea-stall owner near the plant site told us that a few of them who came to know about this, did stage the protest, which also went violent with lathi charge etc from the company goons. Not many could buy the land from the compensation money as money in itself wasn't enough to buy same amount of land plus the land prices due to sudden demand had also increased multifold. Many of them today regret for selling the land as money is nearing its end and they do not still possess any land for future security.

The power plant construction gives employment to total of 1000 people, out of which some of the unskilled labour is taken from Barela. But they haven't given employment to people from any other nearby villages. The operational employment is only 300 'skilled' people, so villagers now fear that they won't get anything

after the plant is constructed. Moreover we saw that the distance between plants and the residential area of Barela was only one separating road. The tea-stall owner mentioned that the realization of the sufferings they will have due to pollution next door, has only come now for the villagers. Some people standing there also told us about proposals that have come to Panchayat Samiti for the cement plant besides this power plant and this time it seems people don't want to part with their land after bitter experiences with JPL power plant. I got hold of EIA document of JPL plant from Rajkumarji and a lot of new facts came to my knowledge. It was shocking to know that some 86 trucks are employed to make rounds with ash from the power plants to the ash loading place and some 56 Ha of area is only built for ash storage for 9 years. It's important to note here that the ash that's generated is more than 150 tonnes per hour (both fly and bottom ash combined). I was reminded of those ash mountains I saw from train on my way to Bilaspur. Coal requirement of this plant is approx 365 tonnes per hour and water requirement is 2362 cubic meter/hour, out of which they are planning to treat and re-use only 392 cubic meter/hour water.

Now the water for this plant, that's obviously going to come from Bargi reservoir, will be taken near village Baragadi in Seoni district. Normally the villagers living on the banks of the reservoir aren't permitted to lift the dam water by any means for agriculture. But permissions are loosened always for power plants and industries. Baragadi is one such village like Tatighat, where every evening people sit on the banks of massive reservoir and keep staring at their lost land in floods of water – water that they aren't supposed to use even after sacrificing their lands. Once displaced, a family goes 20 years back in their life, where they have to start from point zero again for all their basic needs, be it food, housing, education, water, electricity or health. They feel they have a right to the bargi water, for which they were made to give up these precious years of their lives. So, people of Baragadi do not want their water to go to the Barela power plant, and they are ready to fight for this. They had organized a meeting where I went along with Rajkumarji and other Karyakartas. Mammuji, adivasi of this village interestingly taunted that "These days, for any kind of work, it's difficult to find any tehsil official in their offices, but now we know where to go if we want to meet them. They all have opened new office at the power plant site."

A lot of them had issues with pattas of their forest land, and most of them had been cheated by pattas for lesser amount of land than the one that was calculated using PDA. One woman complained that even to give appeal for such issue, she needs to go to Seoni, and when she didn't have money for transportation, she asked her son to go and ask for some work at the power plant site, but he was denied.

Hazardous Effects of Coal fired Thermal Power Plants

I had vague idea of the pollution due to coal fired thermal power plants since I had been following some of the writings on reasons behind saving electricity. When we talk about the pollution of coal power plants, we also have to consider huge water required for generation of electricity and impacts of mining on environment. Moreover, the damage caused due to the cutting of forests mining also has to be accounted for. (Ironically, just as I type these lines, perhaps a lot of middleclass citizens are buying stocks of Coal India, one of the biggest coal giant.) Here's what I could compile with the help of the information gathered from various sources.¹⁸

Major impacts of coal fired power plant on environment

- Hi concentrations of Sulphur Dioxide, Oxides of Nitrogen and SPM around coal based power plants.
- Rise in respiratory disorders in the population living within a 2 -5 km radius of the plant.
- The high amount of carbon dioxide emission from thermal power plants contribute to global warming leading to climate change is significant.

¹⁸ Majority of this information is compiled from various documents provided by Leo S (from ESG)

- Massive fly ash generation that contains a toxic brew of dangerous chemicals and is the largest contributor to mercury pollution.
 - Fly ash contains as main chemical components SiO₂ (51.4 wt%), Al₂O₃ (22.1 wt%) and Fe₂O₃ (17.2 wt%; ignited weight basis). Many toxic elements and heavy metals are also highly enriched in the fly ash relative to the original coal.
 - Water slurry is used to take the ash from the power plant to the ash pond for disposal. Water may contain harmful heavy metals like boron, which have a tendency to leach out over a period of time. When fly ash comes into contact with water, leaches into groundwater supplies which get polluted and unsuitable for domestic use.
 - Large amount of land is used to dispose flyash from the coal based plants. Due to this there is change in natural soil properties. It becomes more alkaline due to the alkaline nature of fly ash.
- Power plants emit around 50 tons of mercury pollution annually. Coal is naturally contaminated with mercury, and when it is burned to generate electricity, mercury is released into the air through the smokestacks.

Kisan Adivasi Sangathan – Kesla

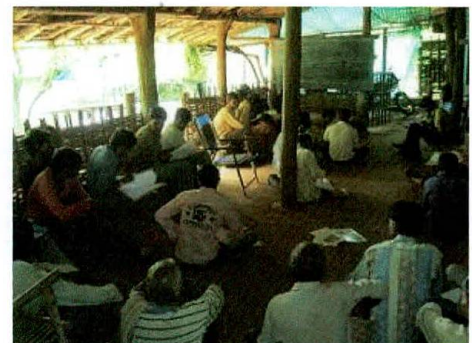
I went to Kesla to meet Sunilji from Kisan Adivasi Sangathan for a day. He and his wife Smita have been working there for last 25 years. Sunilji himself has been one of the displaced from dam on Chambal river. But since his father could hold good education he was able to get the job of lecturer/professor in Government College and since then they have been travelling with transfers. I was awestruck to see the amount of sacrifices the couple had made for the cause and to live up to their ideals. Though being graduated from one of the most renowned institute, he has chosen to live in a mud hut, with even getting rid of the needs such as LPG cooking stove. The only difference in his lifestyle and that of normal villager was the mini library he got in his hut.

Major section of Kisaan Adivasi sangathan comprises of the people who were displaced from Tawa dam, national park and the space created for army firing. As Tawa dam was the first one to be built in Narmada valley, around 40 years back, this couple entered in lives of people much later. Besides his work with Sangathan, I had other meaningful discussion about the history of various movements in India. He elaborated on the emergence and the need behind the political party – Samajvadi Jan Parishad – that he is affiliated with. Well, to an extent I too agree that a strong political movement is an effective tool for bringing in the real change, but it's also evident seeing SJP, how difficult it is to unite people - even that of the well-aware civil society itself - that fighting the deeply corrupted system holds a huge challenge. I wonder if replacing the existing system altogether is a better deal or repairing the existing one. A lot of such questions stay unanswered, and a few will always be.

Mozda Collective

I had heard a lot about Michel Mazgaonkar and Swati Desai from AIDers and was thinking of giving them a visit for long. Recently I got to know that Michel will be in US for 2 months, so I decided to visit there Mozda before that on my way back to Bangalore.

Mozda is a village situated in Dediapada Taluk near Rajpipla. Michel and Swati, both have parents coming from gandhian and JP movements. After a journey together to understand India, they



had stayed in Rajpipla for 2 years and later shifted to Mozda. Since then it has been 20 years of their stay with this community, a collective that they proudly call 'Mozda Parivar'¹⁹. The first thing I noticed after reaching was their house, with Bamboo and mud/cowdung that looks similar to any other house in the surroundings has a lot of things worth noticing. They do have several amenities of city-dwellers that they've collected for last 20 years, but living in the harmony with nature is the observation to take backhome. Michel, basically an engineer, has been into a lot of different types of innovations relating to appropriate energy. Their house does have a connection to grid, but most of their needs are managed with solar panels and wind-mill installed outside the house. The solar cooker that he has made generates heat at 400 degree and can cook food for 15 people easily in 1.5 hours when the sunlight is enough and has a clock setting that rotates its big focusing mirror with the movement of sun after initial calibration. I also saw the much-talked about Pedal power generator that he made with two of his friends Ravi Kuchimanchi (one of the founding members of AID) and Roni. But due to its maintenance requirements and bulky design, it could not make its way through the community.

Their work throughout these years has been widespread but based on the demands from community that they cater to. They have been encouraging watershed development and collective of women for tur dal. Other than that Michel with his innovations, also produces LED lights, recharges batteries of the people that they use to light up their houses (with the help of wind-mill), etc. They also have been giving workshops or trainings on RTI to people that they use to some extent to resolve issues of corruption by people in their routine life. Recently they have started addressing ownership issues related to forest rights act also.

Jan Jagaran Shakti Sangathan, Bihar

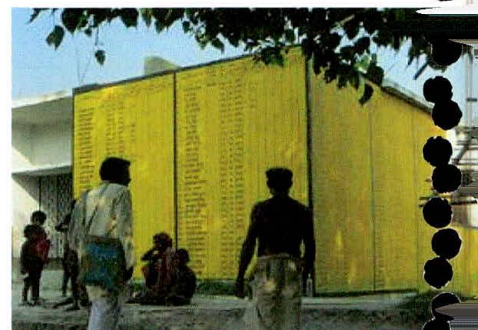
Kamayani Swami and Ashish Ranjan, a couple who has been associated with AID in US and India (Bangalore) for over 3 years, later shifted to Bihar and initiated process of Jan Jagaran Shakti Sangathan(JJSS) in Araria. Kamayani, who spent 2-3 years with MKSS in Rajasthan earlier, has been involved full time with the Sangathan work and Ashish, who's a lecturer in BIT in Patna volunteers during the weekends and holidays. JJSS aims to bring holistic change in lives of rural population by empowering them for 'Sangharsh' and 'Nirman'. For now NREGA stays their central focus, as they've found it a binding force for the people. The seeds of JJSS were sown during the intensive survey of NREGS carried out by Prof. Jean Dreze and other students during the year 2008 in districts of Araria and Kaimur. Ashish and Kamayani had volunteered for that and later decided to get involved further. Due to this, their current focus has been on the implementation of NREGA while building the Sangathan and they plan to expand the focus and make it more holistic in future as the Sangathan grows stronger. After the survey initially the team consisted of a few dedicated volunteers and later they started receiving funds as some of the volunteers begun contributing full time. At present 4 of them are being paid minimum wages for their work. Soon after they started work, they faced massive Kosi floods and had to juggle with relief work, which also in a way helped their team to grow further with more committed volunteers.

JJSS has been using Padyatra as an initial mobilization tool. The team of 10-12 people walk from one village to the other for 5 days with mike and band, carry out meetings with people and try to put forth the idea of the Sangathan along with NREGA awareness generation. JJSS villages are the first to obtain unemployment allowance in the state of Bihar. During the months of June-July, Sangathan along with district administration, organized social audits in 9 blocks and has been following up on them since then. The investigations carried out thereafter even resulted in sacking of 4-5 PRS. The student volunteers who were helping with social audit process, in some cases found that the passbooks of people, lying in post office where in some cases being distributed just before they met the villagers. I spent most of my time helping with follow-up work on the

¹⁹ For more details please refer to <http://www.mozda.net/reports.html>

unemployment allowance, late payment and new work applications in 9-10 villages of Araria and Raniganj blocks and 2 villages of Katihar district.

Ranjit, who's been with JJSS since its inception as a volunteer and now as its full time karyakarta, is a politically inclined fellow, Having been tied with LJP (Lok Janshakti Party) initially, he then went with CPI-M after being influenced by th the party ideology, though hasn't been much of an active political party member. I went to Chatar Panchayat with Ranjit and together we prepared applications for the late payment. The operational guidelines (2008) of NREGA(2005), mention that in case of delay in payment, the worker is entitled to the compensation under payment of wages act 1936. Sangathan decided to use this to push the administration in order to resolve the problem of delay in the wage payment. I found a lot of villagers whose passbooks were still with the postmaster, who apparently felt them at risk in huts of people due to rats and assured people of better safety in the post office!



With Aravind, another karyakarta of JJSS, I went to Katihar district. "I was a 'badmash' fellow before I began volunteering with JJSS" he says. He was introduced to the Sangathan by Ranji and since then his life changed. In Katihar we first met JE of the work done in convergence with flood control department to inquire about the advices that need to be sent in order to push the timely payment. Thereafter we went to Chitoriya gram panchayat with Jiten, a local sangathan member. At Chitoriya Panchayat, I saw series of wall paintings in the community hall building as well as outside Panchayat building that aimed at transparency in terms of budgets of all work plants, number of days each person works for etc.



Chitoriya is situated quite nearby to Katihar city, but still has no electricity connection. The electricity poles are standing tall and wireless since 1985, but I heard they were connecting wires to it before elections! During the night when I stayed at Jiten's hut, I chatted with women including Jiten's wife. Also tried to reason out with people regarding need to have a Sangathan. The seriousness that's given to education was clearly seen by the night tuitions of Kids being conducted in the candle-light by a boy studying in 10th class. Jiten also told me how they've been monitoring the construction of the new school building, giving credit to the presence of the Sangathan.

There was a state order sent to all the Panchayats asking Mukhiyas and Panchayat Rozgar Sevaks(PRS) to hold Gram Sabha on 2nd Oct, in order to discuss the work plans for the next year. The recent social audit for the koskapur had shown very abysmal status of the NREGA works. Hence JJSS karyakartas decided to participate in the Gram Sabha there. I along with Kamayani and others travelled to Koskapur on cycles. This was my first bicycle-ride (perhaps same for Kamayani I guess) that went longer than 40kms with an ordinary bicycle; on flooded, muddy and extremely bumpy rural roads! Koskapur dwellers tolerate the after-effects of kosi-flood almost every year. Almost every half a kilometer, we had to get down of our cycles and walk barefooted through knee-deep flood water, containing matters and species that I didn't want to think about! On our way we stopped by different hamlets to inform people of different meetings. In Rishidev Tola (hemlet of a dalit caste) where we had breakfast, women told us that no child from there was accepted in the school! One child who was earlier admitted in the school said the teacher doesn't let Rishidev kids to enter in the school.

Post lunch I had some conversation with men and women working as agricultural labour. Before NREGA implementation, they used to get meager Rs 20-30 a day for more than 12 hours of drudging in the dirty water and fields. Once they came to know about NREGA through Sangathan Padyatra and then demanded

work. Today because of Rs 114/- of minimum wages of NREGA, their wages of agriculture work has also increased to at least Rs 65-70 a day. Like Koskapur, a lot many parts of Araria district have patches of flood water during monsoons, that are used by landlords for soaking Jute-sticks. Jute sticks have to be macerated in water for over 20 days, after which the fibers are detached. For this, one had to work in the dirty water barefoot and people while doing this get all kinds of diseases. They get one bunch of jute out of every 7 they separate, which they sell at market price. It seemed to me that they end up spending more on health than what they get.



Men and women soaking Jute in water



Flooded roads and fields

Shivnarayan is another interesting JJSS karyakarta. Originally from of Araria, he had been working in plywood industry as a contractor for labour supply for 8 years. Besides that he had special interest and passion for singing, which played significant role in changing his life and introduced him to JJSS during the first of its Padyatra when he heard songs of justice. He started volunteering right after that and now has been working with the Sangathan full time. After Koskapur, with Shivnarayan, I further went to many other villages of Raniganj block. For preparing work-application and late payment compensation application, we went one village after another and did meetings during the nights in different Hamlets. During the nights I discussed at length about plight of landless labour and their causes of migration. During the evenings, I tried to gather a few women to have some female centric conversations. I found that most women I talked to had lost at least child either at birth or before 5 years age. A few had also lost 4-5. Majority of women didn't want to bear multiple pregnancies. Very few, in fact mentioned male-child preference as the reason for multiple pregnancies. It's insecurity of poverty at the old age and the high child mortality that is driving them to have more kids. Educated women were rare to find, but whenever I bumped into one who had even passed till 5th class, I invariably found that they had less than 3 kids and were bolder in communication with me. During one of those days, I ended up with torn cloth and had to borrow a sari from a woman whose house we stayed in. Next day, I pillion rode a bicycle wearing that sari☺.

It's comparatively difficult to unite people and generates awareness looks pretty difficult in the state of Bihar that is extremely divided into castes and religion and has the highest rates of illiteracy, corruption and migration. Every hamlet in each village is divided based on a particular caste. I observed worse living conditions in Mahadalits and Muslims. Feudalism has its own history here, which still prevails and majority of the rural population is landless labour. Poverty also results into abysmal living conditions and sorry health of people. More than half the kids I saw were carrying swollen bally indicating high grades of malnutrition and hunger. Instinctively, I feel partly Bihar's present situation has specific historical reasons. Yet another perspective to be gained is in pipeline.

CHLP Orientation in Bangalore and visits to Hannur and Raichur

Classroom sessions

A lot many interesting sessions arranged throughout 9 months of CHLP (including orientation) were helpful in understanding various dimensions of health and health care. Sessions involved matters such as People's Health Movement, NRHM, community medicines, Drugs and role of IPRs, traditional medicines, HIV-AIDs, maternal and child health, disaster management workshops, sharings from ex-fellows and endless discussion on various issues.

Raichur visit

Untill 1948, Raichur, along with other 4 districts were under Nizam of Hyderabad, due to which this zone is often referred to as Hyderabad-Karnataka. The district has Krishna and Tungabadra rivers passing through north and south of it respectively. Cotton, Paddy, Sunflower and Jowar are the main crops being grown here.

A lot of castism issues prevail in the district even today. 'Lingayata' and 'Gowda' are the major dominant upper caste. 'Nayak' which are not originaly tribals, somehow have got themselves classified under ST, hence they act as a dominant part in ST. 'Chaluwadi' (funeral services) and 'Madiga' (skinning dead animals) consist the majority of the untouchable SC population. Raichur has grossly unequal land distribution. Many gowdas own big chunk of land. An MLA, even today owns 4000 acres of land.

Jagrutha Mahihila Sangathana (JMS)

JMS was started in the month of October 1999 and is managed by Navnirman Trust. The basic objective of the group was to represent the voice of the voiceless, that is women from the SC/ST caste. It currently operates in 3 divisions – Potnal, Balganur, Bagalwada and consists of 2 sanchalaki and 1 karyakarta (co-ordinator) in each division.

Today, it has become a collective of total 40 Sanghas, operating from different villages, primarily by dalit women. These women work on various issues like NREGA, NRHM, PDS, livelihood generation, fighting for other oppressed women etc. For instance, one of the noteworthy struggle by the women was for the loss of jobs due to machine harvesting during the draught years. Protest against that was successful & jobs were given back to peasants. This prevented migration and also the wages were increased. An incident involving gang rape (by 3 upper caste men) of a girl who goes house to house to collect hairs and give a hair pin in return (one of the local form of income generation) was protested by 600 women. By local protests, they could get the rapists into the jail though later they were freed on bail. The women have even protested for upper caste women who were burnt alive.

Chilipili school

Chilipili, the sound of bird, as the name suggests, is the school that was initiated with the intentions of admitting ex-child labourers back to mainstream education. In early years, school was run as a temporary school with different communities on yearly basis. For last 2 years, it has become a residential school under NCLP (National Child Labour Program) and found home inside the JMS hut. Apart from Rs. 11/- for meals (which consist of 3 meals in a day!), kids also get Rs. 100/- per month stipend and books under NCLP. The stipend is deposited in the bank account which opened in the name of each child. Most of the kids, prior to their admission at chilipili, were involved in agricultural labour work. Majority of the kids were working as agricultural labourers or grazing cattle of the land lords. A few of them, we found, were pledged as bonded labour by their parents for the loans taken from landlords. While asking questions about their past, we

hesitated a bit with the thought that it might disturb them, where as nothing of that was true when kids seamlessly shared their background. Perhaps, they would've become immune to such questions, having been asked frequently by the visitors. The teachers are trained in teaching with innovative methods of learning. One of the teachers is also ex-chilipili student who studied till PUC after being admitted back to school by chilipili. A few of the ex-students have applied for Anganwadi workers with the help of JMS karyakarta. So far the school is cattered to approximately 350 kids. The kids, at Chilipili are taught to be self-reliant. Activities such as washing one's own cloths, cleaning of rooms where they sleep, plastering the compound with cow-dung are efficiently taken care of by kids.

Herbal Medicine Unit

Herbal medicine unit of JMS was started by Mita, who after her travel through Raichur villages went to Hyderabad for one month of training in Harbal medicine. She then gathered 80 women from 40 villages to disseminate her learning in the form of training. There was a lack of interest from many women initially but when they found the worth of the knowledge many came forward to learn more. Two women were then sent to Mysore for further training of 8 days, who ended up training 8 more women (2 women from 4 villages) after coming back. With such trainings, the unit has now 16 trained women, who on every Thursday, which happens to be the market day for Potnal, these women open Herbal clinic for the other villagers. JMS Hut gives them space to grow herbs. In the initial period, many women lacked confidence to approach people with their skills. To overcome this, for 2 years, they started using the herbal remedies in their own house first, where they observed quite an improvement in their family health which gave them enough courage to approach the other villagers. Chinamma, who happens to be very good healer, explained us various herbal medicines and their benefits. It was impressive to hear them narrating their stories of cases where they could successfully heal numerous cases of headache, migrain, paralisy and white skin patches.

Terracotta Income generation group

Nearly 80-100 women from different sanghas were trained for terracotta jewellery products during drought years (2001-3) by Koshi, who did his diploma in Pottery. The training was started to generate means of livelihoods when mass migration took place due to severe drought. Half the women dropped out in the end due to difficult nature of the work. It took around one full year to stabilize the group which finally consisted 12-14 women who were determined to go on. During farming season, these women work as agricultur labourers and for the rest of the days they create the jwelleries. They produce depending on orders and go for exhibitions to several places (such as Dastakar exhibitions). The wage standard followed is of the NREGA where in each women draws Rs. 110/- per day as per the number of days she works. Gangamma, who knows reading and writing, manages accounts. The women during our interactions, shared how they have gained more confidence after working independently for years now, and even with the challenge of aging vision, they are determined to go on.



Interactions with Sangha women at Amreshwara camp

Despite the fact that it was late evening when we visited, all the sanga women took time out of their routine schedule gathered at one place for a meeting with us. Their sangha consists of 15 women who have been saving Rs. 20/- per week for last 2 years. The money is deposited in a farmer's co-operative bank and the account is managed by 2 representatives. From the money accumulated in the bank, they provide low interest loans and hence, it helps them avoid loans from money-lender or from banks. "Earlier we used to hide our face with 'pallu' before formaing sangas, but now we simply tie it across our waist and walk

anywhere." a profound fact, most effectively put by one of the Sanga women, upon asking about the changes that formation of sangha brought into their lives.

Nav Jeevana Mahila Okhuta (NJMO)

On the last day of our stay at Potnal, a few women from NJMO visited us and all of us had a good discussion about the splendid work that the Okhuta women have been doing for last 6 years. Navjeevana Mahila Okhuta was started by Abhay Kumar with the initial focus of Devdasi rehabilitation and gradually expanded their intervention into other women's issues. Mokshamma, Dhyamma and Yelamma from NJMO first started with explaining about the devdasi tradition.. (Some bits of this interaction and other learnings about this are captured in a blog post²⁰.) In the initial years they tried to organized women in 4 taluks in Raichur district. Some of the major issues addressed by Okhutta are of wages/employment, housing and education for kids of devdasis. With other partner organizations, they facilitate the vocational trainings of such kids. Some of the orphan kids or the girls that are to become devdasis in near future are sent to Visthar in bangalore, that runs residential school for children at risk. One of the surveys carried out by NJMO, showed more than 300 devdasis living home-less in Raichur, which was sent to the Rajiv Gandhi housing board in Bangalore. After hefty follow up for nearly 2.5 years they could get 280 houses sanctioned, building which again required tremendous amount of work with individual Gram Panchayats and local authorities.

NJMO also intervened in the NREGA related issues for all the oppressed women, including devdasis. Apart from awareness generation about the NREGA, they also helped women to get their job cards, unemployment allowances (when applicable) etc. For example, a 15 days dharna opposite to the DC office which could get women their pending unemployment allowances.

75 SHGs of Lingasur Taluk, under guidance of NJMO, formed a co-operative society which now has 1050 members. It's called as Swabhimana Janapara Vividha Uddesha Sahakara Sangha. It works as a bank that gives 0.5% interest per month for deposits and charges 2% interest for loans. Membership fee is Rs. 125/- and share value is Rs. 100/-. So far the members have put together 9 lac Rupees.

PRA Workshop at Hannur

We went to Hannur for a workshop of PRA (Participatory rural Appraisal), conducted by Dr. Sam Joseph. The most important learning from the workshop I've gathered is not to turn PRA into 'Poke and Run Away' exercise. PRA is not just about drawing several maps and figuring out the situation in a short duration of time. The actual 'participation' can happen only when one becomes a 'stakeholder' into the whole activity. Participation takes a long time, and one needs to be ready to give that much of time. One can't teach people about nutrition unless one tries to understand why people are under nourished at the first place. And it is always important to figure out who's sovereign, people or the government? It always have to be people. I personally could not find much worth in the mere PRA exercises unless one keeps a goal of a true participatory process in the longer run.

Future Plans

It's still difficult for me to come to a decision about my ultimate future plans, but for the time being I've decided to give my time to Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS) in Barwani. I will primarily be focusing on the school, agricultural and reforestation methods, besides taking part in the usual Sangathan work.

²⁰ <http://sejswirlpool.wordpress.com/2010/03/23/servent-of-god-or-victim-of-lust/>

Annexure I - People's hearing on starvation deaths and food related schemes in Gaya

19 May 2010 (at 10AM to 4 PM)

Organiser PUCL, Gaya

Co-organizers: Ekta Parishad, Bihar Dalit Adhikar Manch, Lok Parishad, Roji Roti Adhikar Abhiyan, Voluntary action forum, Gaya

Chief Guest

Justice Shri Rajendra Prasad, Honb'le member of Bihar State Human Rights Commission

Jury Members

- Shri. Harsh Mander Commissioner's of Supreme court food related Schemes

- Ms. (Dr.) Ritu Priya, Nutrition Expert (JNU, New Delhi)

- Shri Tripura Sharanji, President of Khadi board and a member of Bihar State Human Rights Commission

- Dr. Diwakar, Director, A. N. Sinha Institute, Bihar

Advisors of Jury: Vinay Ohdar, Nand Kishore Singh, Arjun Singh., Akshhay Kumar, Balramji, Rupeshji (Advisor to the Supreme Court commissioner for Bihar)

The proceedings started with a short introduction of the chief guest, jury members and advisors. The cases that were to be discussed at the public hearing were identified after an intensive survey done in the Gaya districts and all the proofs were collected which showed them clearly as deaths due to slow/acute starvation. The time span the most deaths was around 5 years. Jagadbhushanji read out the description of all the cases one by one from the survey reports first being taking them one by one for the jury discussion.

Rupeshji clarified the basic purpose of the Jan Sunvayi, mentioning that a lot of reports have already been prepared and submitted to the high court with recommendation of the Supreme Court commissioners in the past, but not much had come out of it. Hence this Jan sunvayi is the result of that year of such process. The Jury is also chosen such that those members can put pressure on the government once they have given their recommendations for the particular cases under discussion.

The relatives of the victims were called up one by one for all the 10 cases under consideration. Several villagers and relatives could not be there as they were not allowed to leave their village as order by the Mukhiya or BDO (as informed to the organizers on phone by the villagers). Each person put his/her plight in front of the jury and then the case was open for jury questions. Below are the some of the major points captured during the case proceedings:

- Murtidevi died on 9th October, 2009, when her son Kishoriji migrated in nearby city in search of work. He had kept 3-4 kgs of grain for her as food but no money was given to her. She had BPL card but she did not get any ration on that. The Card was shown to the jury which had no entry from July 2009 to May 2010. She was eligible for widow pension but wasn't paid ever. Just before 2 days of her death a detailed letter was given to the BDO of her block, complaining about no grain distribution in the block, and expressing the concern of expected deaths due to starvation, that may happen if the administration didn't take any appropriate steps. Kishoriji, her son who was there to present the case to the jury, was asked by Harsh Mander if they possessed Antyodaya card. They did not have the antyodaya card though a few members in their community did possess them. Shri Harsh Mander also asked a few other questions about his migration for work and the status of NREGA in his block. Kishoriji does not have NREGA job card and complained about the fatal status of all the government schemes in his block.

- In 2007, Phulkumari lost her new born baby as she couldn't produce enough milk due to lack of food required to provide her proper nutrition to meet her needs. She too couldn't survive longer than 15 days after her pregnancy due to slow starvation. Her husband Ramvilas, who presented her case, mentioned they did not possess any type of ration card, nor did they have any NREGA work in their village. One hearing what he had to say, Shri Rajendra Prasad (jury member) expressed his concerns about the status of the administration in the district, and also asked the advisors if they can still call the respective officers in their block. He recommended Rupeshji to file a detailed complains with required reports attached, for this and all the cases that they had been discussing, at NHRC and he assured to take required actions for the same in order to provide justice to the right people.
- In another case, it came out that the anganwadi for the particular dalit community of 300 people, even after recommendation by Harsh Mander some 3 years back, kept running in the neighboring village. The CDPO for that block was called, who arrived a few minutes later. On being asked to clarify about the dispute and her actions taken for the same by Harsh Mander, she tried to justify initially mentioning that the other village had higher population and they had proposed a mini anganwadi for this dalit community but the proposal did not pass through. But when Harsh Mander mentioned that there can't be a valid reason for the rejection, as per Supreme Court orders every dalit community is entitled to a separate anganwadi and he had already ordered for the same when he visited a few years back. The CDPO immediately apologized for the delay in action and assured an immediate action in a day's time!
- Jury also questioned BDO about the status, who was helpless in answering all the questions as he had only taken charge 2 days back! He could only give an assurance of looking into all the issues and took a note of the cases being discussed.
- In cases such as Manjudevi's, the anganwadi only existed for mere physical presence but no food supplements were being distributed. Her husband was not even provided with the job card. Shri Rajendra Prasad suggested getting him help with applying for the job card under NREGA and the BDO was asked to take a note of the same by Dr. Diwakar.
- The ADM, Rajiv Ranjan Singh, during his clarifications mentioned that every mukhiya has 100 kg of grain with him to be used for cases of acute starvation, but upon further probing by Shri Harsh Mander about the actual utilization, he did not have much of the information. The members present there explained that grain stock was never released for any of the villages, and always stayed unutilized. However the utilization did exist on paper for the records.
- The ADM was asked by the Jury was were the steps taken by him and his team for the starvation deaths, to which he responded with the results of the post-mortem reports that showed the deaths as caused by illness. This gross misconception was dismissed and proved invalid to him by Dr. Ritu Priya, by the reasoning that when the person cuts down on his/her food intake from what's required for staying away from starvation, due to slow hunger, he/she is prone to catch any illness, but the ultimate root-cause of the death still remains the lack of enough food for the survival! Dr. Rajendra Prasad also added mentioning the Supreme Court orders that stated that post-mortem reports should not be taken as important evidence results to assess the deaths as caused by starvation. ADM also mentioned that after the visit of Shri Harsh Mander (which happened a few years back) they've been looking into the expansion of anganwadis.
- It was noted in most cases that Mid-day meal scheme did not work properly in the schools in those particular blocks. The respective officers from the district education department were absent.

- The District Development Commissioner (DDC) joined half-way through the proceedings who was also questioned by jury. Unfortunately, like BDO, he too was just 15 days old into the district and couldn't respond to the question much to the satisfaction of the jury. He blamed the delay in the NREGA payments to the post office and the bank account processes. The note was taken that there has possibly been no social audit in the Gaya district so far. DDC did take notes of a few cases and assured the immediate action. The issue of dates of the payments, not being entered in the job cards, he said will be taken care of from now on. He also accepted the fact that till date no unemployment allowance has been given in the Gaya district. On leaving the hall, he urged the people to apply for their job cards and assured that unemployment allowances will be given to all those who deserved. He also provided his mobile number (9431818518) to everyone for direct complaints. The FIRs will also be filed for a few of the cases that were discussed.
- In the end of the hearing, the verbal survey was done by Shri Harsh Mander asking questions to the people present such as: Who all have BPL Card, antyodaya card?; Do they get ration regularly on their card?; Do they get payment of NREGA in time, or unemployment allowances for that matter?; Who all were entitled to the old age pension and actually received the same?

In most questions, responses did not seem to show positive indications of the situation of the district.

Jury Recommendations:

Dr. Diwakar

Our constitution gives the right to live to each individual but it seems clearly how it is given to these people who were under consideration today. The schemes are not seen to be reaching to the people who deserved them. There's a lack of awareness from the part of authorities as well as people about the entitlements under the schemes and the relation to the local ground level issues part from theoretical understanding. People too need to be mobilized and get united to fight for their justice. The measurement process should also include the people who are starving.

Women as always seen are the most deprived in every case. And the system though with a lot of provisions still needs to be more sensitive towards the needs of women.

This Jan Sunvayi needs proper documentation and be carried out in all the places likewise.

Dr. Ritu Priya

She reiterated her point that the definition of the starvation death followed by the administration is flawed and post-mortem reports should not be taken as an important evidence for the reasoning process.

Shri. Tripuraji Sharan

He stated the observation that most cases were from the blocks where majority of the government schemes were total failure. And such a disastrous status for any block/district can only exist due to carelessness of the administration and corruption.

Shri Harsh Mander

He has been visiting around various villages as special commissioner of Supreme Court for the Right to food case but sadly noted that his observations at Bihar are the worst. The government schemes in Bihar have been most unsuccessful consistently and have failed primarily due to corruption. The distribution look good on paper but benefits are not at all reaching the poor. He recommended that to start with all the dalit bastis should be assured with benefits of all the schemes, which is the least that can be done to be on the path of justice and later it should be scaled up to other bastis.

Annexure II- Appeal: Condemn arrests of adivasis in Barwani, MP

Three *Adivasis*, including Valsingh Sastia, senior leader of *Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan*, have been arrested on serious non-bailable charges, on a complaint filed by the Forest Department. In May, villagers of Karanpura and other villages of Pansemal range had got together to donate some wood to their comrade, Valsingh Bhai, the roof beams of whose house had begun to rot. These were slender logs taken from trees that they had grown and protected on their own land. When Valsingh Bhai was transporting this wood to his home, he was stopped by Pansemal forest range officials. He explained that he was carrying this wood for house building and that it had been given to him by his comrades. The forest officials first said that they had called the SDO who would take a decision in this matter. When the SDO failed to appear, but word started spreading in the area that Valsingh has been wrongfully stopped and local people started gathering at the spot, the forest officials disappeared.

Two days later, a case of loot and robbery, obstructing and harming government officials was registered against Valsingh Bhai and 2 others- Bhaisingh Davar and his son Shera Davar(392, 353,332 IPC). The latter two were arrested last week and Valsingh Bhai was arrested today. Bhaisingh Davar's tractor has been confiscated.

Valsingh Sastia has been leading adivasis of Barwani district in their struggle for the realization of their legal and constitutional rights, including rights under the Forest Rights Act.

There is great anger among the adivasis of this predominantly tribal district. This incident has roused an ancient anger against forest-police violence. Kacharsingh Dudwe, Tarkibai, Bilatibai and others are protesting asking "do adivasis have the right to a roof over their heads? When we do not even have enough food to eat how we can build cement houses. All adivasis live in kacha houses with timber roof beams. So they should arrest the entire adivasi community. This was wood from trees grown by us, why is the government harassing us with false cases? In any case it is the forest department that has destroyed the forest. Even today illegal forest timber is being openly sold under the very noses of forest officials with their full connivance." The Forest Rights Act acknowledges the "historical injustice" done to adivasis and acknowledges their right to dwellings in and around forest areas.

Thousands of adivasis affiliated to Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan, including women and children have already started a sustained agitation against these arrests. Around 2000 adivasis participated in a two day protest dharna at 5 police stations of the district on 27-28th July. Pansemal range was gheraoed, though when the forest officials saw the people coming, they locked their office and homes and ran away. Adivasis are planning mass courting of arrests at least 6 police stations within the next few days.

Please condemn these arrests and join us in our protests.

Annexure III - Right to food Campaign – April 2010 to November 2010

Chronological updates of the Right to Food Campaign since the time I started volunteering as a part of CHLP.²¹

Dharna for National Food Security Act - 15th to 19th April

- 15th to 19th April - 2010 - Dharna for National Food Security Act - Protests spanning for 5 days included people burning effigy of NFSA outside parliament, human chains and protests outside planning commission. The event culminated in a Panel discussion on food security act with the members of parliament and planning commission.
 - Report of the dharna
 - Campaign documents
 - Presentation to MPs on NFSA
 - Open letter to PM
 - Campaign statement on estimating and identifying poverty in India
 - Letter to the members of Parliament
 - Campaign Draft for National Food Security Act
 - In media :
 - NDTV: People's protest
 - WSJ : Protest alert food debate simmers in delhi
 - Other media clippings
 - Photographs
- 18th April, 2010 - Planning commission revises BPL estimate as per Tendulkar committee guidelines to 37.2%
- 20th April, 2010 - Press conference held at Women's press club to state campaign demands on NFSA
- 22nd April, 2010 - RTF campaign's letter to EGoM before it's meeting on NFSA
- 25th April, 2010 - 35kg of food grains to be given to BPL families

RTF campaign and NAC

- July, 2010 - National Advisory Council formed
- 14th July, 2010 - NAC meets on food security act
- 15th July, 2010 - Campaign Responds to NAC press release
- 30th July, 2010 - Right to food Campaign consultation with NAC for Food Security Bill
- 23rd September, 2010 - An open letter to NAC members
- 28th October, 2010 - NAC finalizes it's recommendation and Prof Jean Dreze publicaly sends a disagreement note
- November 11 - Campaign responds to NAC recommendation and announces protests against it during November 25th-26th

National Convention on Right to food & Work

- August 6-8th, 2010 - 4th National Convention on Right to Food & Work
 - Photographs
 - Resolutions : Hindi, English (detail, Summary)
 - Primers on National Food Security Act : English, Hindi

Rotting Grains, Supreme Court orders and Campaign Protests

- August-October 2010 - Supreme Court orders on Rotting Grains and campaign action
 - 12th August (Hindi)

²¹ In case of printed version of this report, where in hyperlinks cannot be accessed, please refer to this weblink - <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/links/updates.html>

- [31st August \(Hindi\)](#)
- [6th September](#)
- [In media](#)
- [RTF Campaign's response on SC orders](#)
- [September-October - Nation-wise protests over grains rotting in godowns \[summary\]](#)
- [Sept 13 - Right to food campaign's statement on PMs views regarding SC intervention in the realm of policy \[more\]](#)
- [Court: Can Centre supply grain to 7 crore BPL families left out of PDS?](#)

Important Articles:

[The task of making the PDS work - Jean Dreze](#)

[Loosing their nerve - Jean Dreze](#)

[Jean Dreze interviewed by Tehelka](#)

[Frontline: Food Insecurities - R Ramakumar](#)

[No right to food yet! - Praful Bidwai](#)

[A right denied - Jayati Ghosh](#)

[Toads for breakfast - Biraj Patnaik](#)

[How right are you, Dr Singh - P Sainath](#)

[Food Security - by definition - P Sainath](#)

[The muddle in Food Security - Himanshu](#)

[Give them right to food - Mohammad Anis](#)

[The early Kalidasa Syndrome - Utsa Patnaik](#)

[The wrongs about right to food](#)

Sejal's file
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Learnings and experiences at Dharna against proposed National Food Security Bill:

Dharna was organized by Right to Food campaign against the proposed National Food Security Bill, 2010. The event spanned from 15th April to 19th April, culminating in a panel discussion with various political leaders and a member of planning commission. The protests demanded the food and nutritional security for all the citizens of the country rather than targetting it only to BPL category of people which has brought the country today to a nutritional crisis.

The major campaign demands are:

- Remove APL BPL- subsidised food for all
- Nutritional security with per head monthly entitlements of 14 kgs of cereals, 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil
- Expand PDS procurement and use PDS to revitalise agriculture
- Make procurement and distribution local and decentralised
- Children's right to food to be ensured
- Special rights for vulnerable and excluded
- No cash transfers
- Food entitlement cards in the name of women
- Effective grievance redressal mechanisms, with punishments, penalties and compensation
- Affirmative action for Dalits, Adivasis and other socially discriminated groups

More than 2500 people from 19th states, coming from 200 various groups took part in the event, on different days. The dharna took place at a footpath place on Jantar Mantar road, where mikes and speakers were also arranged for people to come up and share their problems. Almost everyone who protested spoke about issues faced by them in their states and villages and what is wrong with the current food security bill and what they see as solutions. People used folk songs, puppets etc to voice their opinions and problems. There were a lot of interest slogans in Hindi that came out of the five day event. One second day, all the protesters went near parliament and burn the effigy of the NFSA draft. 300 people got themselves court arrested and set at parliamentary police commissioner's office and there also they kept their dharna alive by speech given by people like Sandeep Pandey. The parchas were distributed to the staff at police commissioner's office and it was learnt that although the police staff did agree with a lot of the demands, they were duty bound and were not ready to support due to the same reason. The their day was as eventful where in the protesters went to Planning commission's office where the meeting to decide the poverty estimate was taking place. Around 35 dharnarthi sneaked themselves out and reached planning commission's office, and asked for the discussion with the members. As a result Mr. Abijit Sen and Ms. Sayeda Hameed did come out till the gate, talked to the protesters and took the memorandum from them to discuss during their meeting. A human chain with more than 600 people was formed on the fourth day and all walked on two sides of roads without disrupting the traffic.

People like Kavita Srivastava, Anuradha Talwar, Vandana Prasad, Madhuri K., Annie Raja, Sandeep Pandey shared information about the act and issues by giving speeches throughout the five days of event. The protesters also heard people like Anuradha Chenoy, Jayati Gosh, Com. D. Raja (CPI), Colid Gonsalves, Harsh Mander, Dr. C. P. Chandrashekhar, Mr. Surendra Mohan, Justice Rajendra Sachar, etc, all of whom extended their support to the demands raised by Right to Food campaign.

On the 5th day, the event culminated with a Panel discussion that consisted of political leaders voicing their opinions. The discussion was chaired by Mr. Vinod Raina of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS).

Anuradha and Madhuri presented the major points concerning the proposed food security act and

showed how the universalization is feasible with proper calculations on the food grains and budgetary allocations for PDS. Please refer to Annex I for the details of the presentation in brief.

The other panelists were Ms. Brinda Karat (CPI-M), Mr. Ali Anwar (JDU), Mr. Renato Maluf (President, Brazilian National council for food and nutrition), Mr. Bardhan (CPI), Mr. Prakash Javdekar (BJP), Mr. D. Raja (CPI), Mr. Dharendra Jha (CPI-ML) and Mr. Abhijit Sen (member, Planning Commission). The discussion ended with closing note by Mr. Harsh Mander (Special commissioner appointed by Supreme Court for RTF Case). The overall voice from all the panelist was in favour of the campaign demands.

Photographs of the event:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/DharnaAgainstDraftFoodSecurityAct201015thAprilTo19thApril>

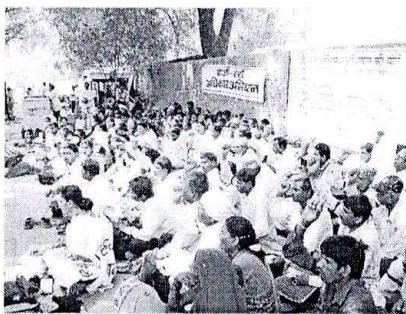
Paper cuttings of the media coverage:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/MediaCoverageOfDharna15thTo19thApril>

Post dharna follow ups with Parliamentary members (20th-21st April)

A press conference was arranged at Women's press court to inform the media about the findings of Right to food campaign related to the availability of the grains and budget for the universalization. All the issues with the present draft of the bill were also discussed. (The detailed and formal event report with all the media coverage is under preparation). Different campaign delegations met with Mr. Sharad Pawar, Mr. Arun jaitley, Mr. Rajanath Singh and Mr. Lalu Yadav.

Personal Reflactions on my role and the processes



I reached delhi right after finishing orientation at CHC and next day as it was discussed earlier I dropped by at the campaign office, 4 days before the dharna was scheduled. Trishan, who was in-charge of the secretariat work at the time and was so valiantly fighting multiple task before dharna that delighted to find another volunteer, and all happened so suddenly that within a day's time I found myself too running around for different things. It was indeed a challenge to handle an event where more than 2000 people are expected to participate for 5 days.

arranging for required logistics, in the middle of other things was going to be eventful! The upcoming CWG have denied the citizens rights to voice their decentive opinons and the time for dharna was hence limited from 9am to 5pm, which made it necessary for us to plan for accommodation for all the outstation participants. In two days time, I got introduced to all the groups active in Delhi for Right to food, though I had been staying in NCR for last 7 months, never did I anticipate so many active groups working towards the issues related to PDS and ICDS. Side by side, I was also co-ordinating with other state groups for finding out the number of participants arriving from each state. There were delegations meeting a few political party leaders each day, and more were scheduled. Besides all these, what baffled me was the fact that the panelists were yet not decided and many MPs and Political Party members were being pursued for the dialogue on 19th. Anyhow, what matters the most is that one by one the tasks were taken up and shared properly and things were made to happen as planned.

A lot of women from different parts of Delhi and other states came on the first day. Many were from Rajasthan who added a unique flavour. The dharna was a lot different than I had imagined it to be. I

c. p. 200

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had been wondering what will people do sitting at one place, most of whom will be on fast! But the presence of mike could keep everyone alive and occupied. A lot of innovative songs, the one specially from Rajasthan were indeed thought-provoking. Rajasthani women added a unique flavour, with their corageous tone and puppet shows. Kavita, Anuradha, Vandana, Rupesh and a few other leaders first shared the main intent of the dharna, the demands and issues with the present form of food security bill. Thus, the dharna as a byproduct also became a tool to make the community more aware about their rights and what was happening in the country as a larger picture. But more than these speakers, most stimulating factor was the tales shared by people from diverse parts of the country. Members of many small sangathans came forward to voice their opinion without any fear of the people around them.

During the initial days, seeing so many people flowing in at the dharna place, I even wondered if all of them knew why they had come at the first place. But soon when I started talking to the women, and hearing them speak, I was ensured that they not only knew why they had come all the way from their hometown, but they had courage to face the worst when they decided to pitch in with their time. It may have been very easy for people like me to arrange the events like this, but those, besides traveling and other costs, it also compromised their 5-6 days wages. I compared their such trip to my trips, where I usually plan where to stay, how to travel and reach the place, but that wasn't the case with those fellows, who didn't even know where they would be put up for next 5 days, what they will eat and how they will go back to their villages. This gave me all the more reasons to play active role in all the arrangements as it was the least I could do for their selfless controbution.

One important observation to make here is, the dominance of the women in the crowd. In general also, women are seen to be more participatory in the struggle and most groups for any community intervention, first start with self help groups of sanghas that contain participation from community women. Be it Potnal, or Right to food dharna or any other event, I've seen women always more empowered and sensitized about the injustices surrounding them and keen to work towards solutions. Perhaps, it's also driven by the fact that women are the most downtrodden and abused section of the society and women labourers again come under the lower than the lowest strata of the society. Naturally they will be more inclined to fight for their justice their men counter-parts in the similar strata.

Different ways were being thought out for registering protests. One of the days all went near to the parliament and burnt the effigy of the NFSA. In spite of the court arrest, all of us gave speeches and kept chanting slogans inside dharna. One of which was "Sarkar hamese darti hai, police ko aage karti hai" (The government is scared of us and keeps police forward). I even distributed the pamphlets to the police staff and asked their opinion on the issue under consideration. Almost all of the staff were in our favour but they showed their helplessness to support as they were dutybound. One the third day, the police had become quite alert and it took some bit of fooling around to get to the planning commission. Approximately 30 of us could get away from the attentive police staff and stayed outside the planning commission asking for a dialogues with members. The campaign was become so well-known around jantar manter that in the end of the 5 days time, most police officers knew major campaigners and Pandey could also make good rapport with some of them which helped us in carrying out rally and human chain during last two days.

Reva Towards the end of the third day, late evening saw a huge union of 600 farmers joining us from Bharatiya Kisan Union, Riva district, MP, that was led by Tripathiji. This group was an extremely spirited lot which showed that despite stark poverty and hunger of the farming community, the spirit to fight could not be snatched away. stated that despite being a drought affected district the Government of MP had not given the farming community any compensation. NREGA was run in a very feudal manner. They said that their food security was dependent on farming which was not being at all supported by the Government. They also wanted cheap rations and felt that the

Government had failed to select the real poor in the BPL. This group also decided that they would do an all night protest. so they fought tooth and nail with the police when it tried to throw them out of Jantar Mantar. Finally, the police and the group reached a settlement with the mediation of the RTF people that they were kept in Ambedkar Bhawan for the night. Next day, when I came by Metro at Patel Chawk, I saw all of them crowding metro station, and the response and treatment of the metro (low level) staff was really appreciable. I stayed for a few minutes to facilitate interaction of the metro staff with them, and the members of the security and housekeeping staff indeed sympathized with them, perhaps also because, they go through similar issues themselves!

My role and observations with Secretariat at Right to food campaign

Since the campaign secretariat was vacant for a few days, I volunteer to support it with my capacity. The time I had was utilized in making the report for the dharna and some good reading. Initially when I was approached with hints if I could serve at secretariat for longer term after the fellowship and also intersperse the secretariat work with the fellowship, I did see some possibilities of it, but just a few days passed by in the office of secretariat, I was already finding myself feeling the helplessness of sitting comfortably where I could utilize the time by getting into action on the field. I did not see much point in reading eternally and not getting anything into implementation. In the meantime, Trilochan, the current secretariat returned back and explained me a lot of other things. For the first time perhaps, I managed the accounts for some event, and as scared I was for the blunders in that, I'm glad that I could tally them all in the end!

I could not help myself comparing the Right to Food campaign with the Anti-GM campaign that I was (perhaps I still am) involved with. The positives for the RTF are that it's quite structured with steering group to manage and decide upon important tasks and an advisory group that helps day-to-day secretariat tasks. Another good thing is, it's steering group has the presence from many states , advisors to the commissioners and JSA members. Thus the decisions are democratically taken and it leaves very less chances of any single person deciding upon something on her/his own. At the same time, I could see many old members associated from the start of the campaign are now closely associated with each other and somewhere I am taking the liberty of assuming that ongoing supreme court case may also have played a significant role in keeping people together. People at the commissioners office too are very helpful to the campaign and overall there's a synergy in the individual thoughts and ideologies. The campaign website too, so far is the most organized and informative amongst the ones I've seen. But the very structure and democratic method of decision-making also delays many important decisions, circulation of informations and announcements. The flow of information from the states to the center may be happeninig point-to-point via e-mails, somewhere it's also needed that the e-mails are sent to the groups created to connect people together. But many groups in one state do not know what's happening in the neighbouring state, unless they are connected via any alternative links.

Jaipur PUCL visit:

PUCL, Jaipur was conducting 3 days workshop for the ActionAID trainees and some of the law students and I thought of chipping in during that time. The training consisted of many sessions on laws in general, primarily on labour law, facilitated by Ashok Khandelwal, who also happens to be the state advisor of right to food case for Rajasthan. It was enlightening to know the loop-holes in our labour laws and some of the systems initiated by a few groups in Rajasthan. I also went to some of the chokthi where the labourers assemble early morning hoping to get work. Many of these labourers migrate from parts of MP during summer when agriculture comes to halt at most places. The NREGA pays them onlhy Rs 50 in their hometown and they found that they would be paid double in jaipur for construction works. Little did they know about such chokthi systems when they migrated from their hometowns. Incidentally, during the very visit, the government of Rajasthan

announced Rs. 2/- per kg for wheat for BPL population and increase in BPL quota by approx. 10 Lac. The newspaper painted the good news with headlines such as "Rajasthan to get cheap ration from May day" etc. But the hidden facts of the agenda are that with the rate of per kg grain, the total entitlement per family were also reduced from 35kg to 25kg. It was Ashokji who observed this first and brought it to the notice and Kavita and other members of Rozi Roti Abhiyan in Rajasthan immediately took up the issue, made memorandum for the food secretary, principle secretary and chief minister informing the direct violations of Supreme Court orders. It was inspiring to see Kavita juggling between PUCL work, this recent issue and the training of interns and her energy levels are surely appreciable. Unfortunately or fortunately, due the death of the state governor the new scheme inauguration was delayed till 10th May, giving campaigner some more time to put up the struggle.

Issues with Kekuri village

While the members of Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan begun discussing the next plan of action, just after the press conference finished; approximately 30 villagers from Kekuri (a small village, that is 3.5 hours away from jaipur) entered the hall. They were visiting jaipur with the intention of seeking help in order to solve their village problems. The crowd also consisted of all the ward members and a woman sarchanch. The primary problem villagers were facing is of the terror of ex-sarpanch, who, during his term had played huge fraud with accounts and finances (mainly in the NREGA funds). Due to this, he has been harrasing the present sarpanch and almost not letting her perform her duties. The fellow draws his power by the fact that his mother has now become the Pradhan of the Panchayat Samiti and hence, he has positioned one of his man with new lady-sarpanch to take decisions on her behalf.

Members of Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan after listening to the villagers, tried to test the strength of the people and how much united can they get by asking pointed questions. After getting enough satisfaction regarding the determination of the villagers to fight their problems, it was decided that Chajju (from Fagi village) will them to the Project Director of NREGA and the Priciple Secretary of Rural developement and Panchayati Raj. More progress on the case is yet to be followed up.

*Bhukh ke viruddha – Bharat ke liye...
Jantar Mantar par Jung!*

Report on dharna cum relay fast to expose
the government's draft National Food
Security Act*

(Delhi, 15-19 April 2010)

* Prepared by the Right to Food Campaign Secretariat. Main contributors: Sejal Parikh,
Trishna Senapaty, Lavanya Devdas.

Introduction



The dharna from the 15th to the 19th April gave new life to the Right to Food Campaign. It was unique because it had the participation of groups who never before were seen in the Right to Food campaign meetings. Every day the organisations that we had never heard or known off arrived. This brought in a great deal of energy and enthusiasm for all of us, which is not to say that those who have been committed on the issue from long were any less enthusiastic. But the feeling that the campaign is vigorously growing in numbers was tremendous.

It also communicated that the situation on the ground is deteriorating for the poor. More hunger, more distress for survival. With increasing prices and no support of the Government, people were seeking newer platforms to share this distress.

The demands were that food and nutritional security be provided to all citizens of the country. Issues relating to agriculture and Food production be integral to the National Food Security Act and that a comprehensive Food entitlements Act be enacted with universal entitlements rather than restricting benefits to a few by targeting

The five day dharna consisted of several creative ways in which the demands were brought into the public domain for discussion and collective action. Apart from speeches, songs and plays, participants wore on their bodies overalls with demands painted on them, participants burnt the effigy of the Prime Minister which was followed by Courting Arrest. There was also a, protest outside the Planning Commission, forming a Human Chain and stopping traffic for a while, meetings with some ECOM members and members of all political parties and then finally on the last day, the dharna culminated with a panel discussion at the constitution club with leaders from various political parties, including MPs and a member of the planning commission.

People came from Far and Wide

State	Number of Participants
AP	5
Asaam	20
Bihar	60
Chattisgarh	5
Delhi	1097
Gujarat	68
Hariyana	5
HP	21
Jharkhand	4
Karnataka	4
Maharashtra	3
MP	814
Orissa	13
Punjab	81
Rajasthan	202
Tamilnadu	4
UP	129
Uttarakhand	5
Meghalaya	2
West Bangal	10
Total	2552

Total of over 2500 people attended the dharna (spanning from 15th to 19th April) from 19 states of India.

Day one brought in hundreds of the poor from the streets and periphery of Delhi. Delhi does not want to know, see or listen to this lot neither do most of the Parliamentarians. Increasingly these people are becoming invisible in Government policies and the Delhi police's job is to drive them out. So much so that the symbol of democratic dissent that Jantar Mantar has been representing, has also been snatched away. In the name of beautification of the city and security of the players in the common wealth games (which is six months away), that permission for twenty four hour dharnas is not given any more. We were not allowed to sit for beyond 5pm. No tents were allowed. It was later we discovered that the permission was from 8am to 8pm but since the change in duty happened at 5pm, they forced us to leave the place by 5pm.

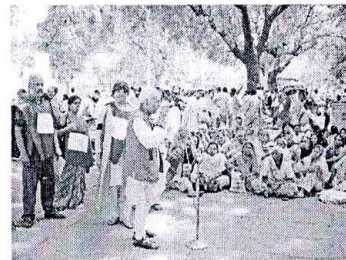
More than 700 people homeless and katchi basti women thronged the dharna. The plight of the homeless, their right to food and shelter, the risk of living on the street was presented through songs, plays and speeches. At the same time what had upset the hundreds of women who had come from the various Kachi Basti was the fact that the APL and BPL had divided the poor. Very few got the right to subsidised food. But what was really bothering them and which they clearly articulated was the shift from grain to cash in the PDS. The Government of Delhi had taken a decision just a few days earlier that out of 9 the nine districts in the State of Delhi in two cash would be provided per household. Their slogans " Sheila tere shashan mein, Bartan Bik gaye Ration mein and "ration mein anaaj chahiye, Nakad nahi" showed their vocalisation of their protest. The women also spoke of how even aganwadis were not being opened in Bastis despite families going and making their demands. Gulabi Devi, resident of JJ Colony, Bhawana said "Only the head of the household will get the cash. If it is in the name of the male then the cash will be used for drinking and gambling. The family will not

benefit. We need ration not cash.” Rupeshji, who's state advisor to Commissioner for Bihar, helped with coordination activities for the first two days. He also shared similar experiences from Bihar and encouraged people to come up and voice their opinions. Karooji from Bodh Gaya also sang a lot of songs on hunger and starvation.

The finest surprise on day one was the arrival of the group from the North East. More than 11 members from the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh participated. They spoke about the large scale corruption that prevented any goods of the PDS or ICDS from reaching the people. Many of them had been using the RTI and had exposed the corruption, but the Government fully protected the errant officials. They also said that many a time's corruption was covered up in the name of militancy.

Eminent leaders, social activists and academicians including, former chief justice of the Delhi High Court, Justice Rajender Sachar, Senior Socialist leader Sh. Surendra Mohan, **Magasaysay awardee** Sandeep Pandey, Special Commissioner of the SC in the Right to Food Case, Shri Harsh Mander and Prof. of International studies, JNU Anuradha Chenoy addressed the dharna along with several other speakers from the States.

Lending wholehearted support to the protest, eminent jurist, Justice Rajendra Sachar that pointed out, “On the one hand, the government has waived Rs. 125,000 crores loan for the industrialists and is keen to provide fresh loans to them. On the other hand, by global standards, although 90% of the people come under the BPL category, the government is only willing to consider 37% of the population as BPL household category. To make matters worse, they are planning to reduce further the supply of ration for them.”



Shri Harsh Mander, Special Commissioner on Right to Food, Supreme Court of India said: “There is no shortage of food and resources in the country, but it is the government's responsibility to ensure that no one suffers from hunger and no child suffers from malnutrition. This obligation will not be fulfilled if the government supplies 25 kg ration to a limited few. Today some people have excess food and money while others go to be bed hungry. It is time to change this situation.”

Shri Surendra Mohan, Former Member of Parliament emphasized that within the government there is no consensus on the number of BPL households. “While Suresh Tendulkar, Financial Advisor has estimated in his report that more than 37% of the people belonging to the BPL category government continues to project the figure of 28%,” he said.

Extending support to the Dharna, Prof Anuradha Chenoy, International studies, JNU said “All the people of the country are with you. This is your right. India's economy is growing every year by 8%. The government cannot say that there are no budgets to guarantee the delivery of basic entitlements of the people. The nutritional rights of people must be secured at any cost.”

The speakers also opposed the proposed recommendation by Smt. Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of Delhi to provide cash to the ration cardholders in lieu of monthly ration supplies.

Day two and three saw hundreds of people from all over the country raise their voice for comprehensive Food Entitlements Act. Several primitive tribes and communities who perennially live in hunger were also represented by few members. We had the Sahariyas from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Korkus from Khandwa, the Korbais/ Baigas from MP and also the Musahar community from Eastern UP. Representatives of the Korkus from MP stated that the dip in populations between the census of 1991 and 2001 was 19% which would show a further dip in 2011 census. This dip in numbers was nothing but a very high death rate due to increasing hunger and malnutrition of these communities. Sugandhi, who works at Khandwa, actually did a commendable job at helping with coordination of dharna.

On the second day of the five-day dharna cum fast, the activists decided to intensify their struggle -



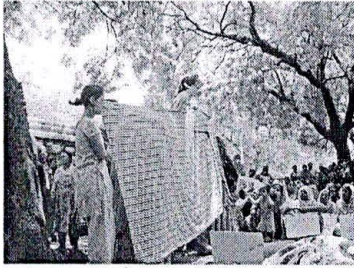
300 of them marched from Jantar Mantar to Parliament House and burnt an effigy of the proposed National Food Security Act and over 200 protestors arrested. Even inside the police station, people did not lose their enthusiasm and kept their slogans, songs and speeches going. We also distributed our *parchas* to police staff.

For more photographs, please check this [here](#):

Later in the afternoon Comrade Raja, MP (CPI) who visited the dharna site to express his solidarity emphasized the fact that Right to Food is a fundamental right and this Campaign is the most significant Campaign in our country. He made it clear whenever the Bill in its present form is placed in the Parliament the Left Front parties will oppose it. He lamented that the “government is still not clear about how to define poverty and set poverty criteria. On one hand the government is talking about Right to Food Legislation and on the other hand the food subsidy has been reduced to 424 crores.”

The senior economists Dr. Jayanti Ghosh and Dr. C.P. Chandrashekar from JNU, made it clear that “Universalisation of PDS at Rs 35 kg per household will only cost 1.2% of the GDP.” Hence, they rubbished the arguments being put forward by the government that the burden of increased expenditure on the exchequer and non-availability of food grains has made it impossible to implement a universal public distribution system. Speaking to the protesters Professor of Health Community Medicine, JNU, Dr. Ritu Priya said that it was shameful that the fate of India's poor was worse than that of Africa and that the situation in India was of hunger amidst plenty. Godowns were overflowing and wheat also rotting but still the poor were being denied. We also had very insightful sharing by our members from Orissa as to how the government tries to hide the starvation death happening in the state.

Later in the day, the Sahariyas presented a story of how court monitoring of the hunger situation in Baran, Rajasthan had resulted in reduction in deaths of children due to malnutrition; however, child mortality was still very high. In spite of NREGA people in several parts of the district of Baran were going for private agriculture work. This was due to the fact the payments were delayed by more than three months and even the bank discriminated against them. The free 35 kgs entitlement in the PDS by the state government was a saviour. It was only for the Sahariyas. A community with less than fifty years history of sedentary agriculture also talked of how their land had been snatched by dominant communities and they wanted to also grow their own food. Health services and Education facilities was a dream.



For more photographs, please check [here](#):

On day two, people also heard the story of the Bhopal Gas victims who were sitting with their demands in the dharna next to ours that got tears in people's eyes. While everybody agreed that all the families must be immediately made beneficiaries of the AAY. Total support was also extended to them for their struggle.

The Right to Food Campaign unanimously rejected the decision taken on 17th April by the Planning Commission to accept the poverty figure recommended by the Tendulkar Committee.

Day 3 again began with strong reactions to the decision of Smt. Sheila Dikshit's to shift to cash coupons and close down PDS shops in two districts, Colin Gonsalves, Executive Director, Human Rights Legal Network (HRLN) said that the "Right to Food Campaign condemns Smt. Sheila Dikshit's decision" and pointed out that "since the decision has been taken at a time when Justice Wadhwa Report is being considered by the Supreme Court, we view it as an attempt to sabotage the Supreme Court case."

Soon after Colin finished his speech at the dharna, more than 35 persons escaped the tight security of the police and reached the Planning Commission at 12 p.m. to present their memorandum demanding that there be universal access to ration. Given the fact that heavy police *bandobast* that had been deployed to prevent the protesters from meeting anyone in the Planning Commission and to keep them cordoned off at Jantar Mantar, the protesters with difficulty found ways of breaking free. "It is ironical that communities who are most impacted by the decisions of the Planning Commission are not consulted and instead kept out, denied entry and prevented from interacting with the members of the Planning Commission," stated Kavita Srivastava from the Right to Food Campaign. When the 35 members reached Yojana Bhawan, they found themselves stopped at the gate.

Anuradha Talwar made it clear that the estimates of poverty put forth by the Tendulkar Committee, which stands at 37% cannot be applied to food entitlements. "We insist that access to food should be universal and de-linked from the poverty estimation." She pointed out that with the present coverage of PDS amounting to 36%, what "the government is seeking to do is maintain status quo and at a time when large sections of people are experiencing acute hunger and malnutrition."

Madhuri from Jagruth Adivasi Dalit Samiti said: "Our demand is every adult should be entitled to 14 kg food grains (as per ICMR recommendations). Along with wheat and rice, the PDS should also provide ragi, jowar, and bajra. If the government says there is no food in the country they need to promote agriculture. We have the capacity to produce enough food. It is not that we have to import food from outside."

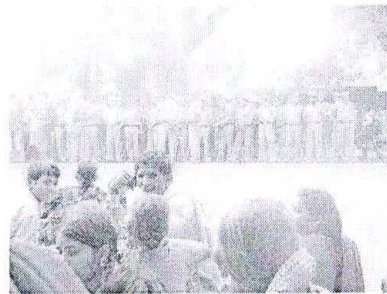
The protesters wanted to meet Shri Montek Singh Alhuwalia, Deputy Chairperson of the Planning Commission as he had organized a special meeting to decide on the poverty estimation line for the country. "For the Right to Food Campaign as far as food, health, work, education and social security are concerned the right has to be a universal one" stated Kavita Srivastava. Hence, it became essential to meet members of the Commission and convey our point of view" she added. After protesting for an

hour, the Deputy Chairperson of the Commission relented and sent two members, Dr. Abhijit Sen and Dr. Syeda Hameed to meet the 35 strong protestors. The members were informed about the decision of the Campaign to reject the Planning Commission's decision to accept the poverty estimation arrived at by the Tendulkar Committee.

While the 30 odd protestors were at the Planning Commission, the rest of the group which had been prevented from reaching the Commission decided to march up to the Parliament Police Station and register their protest against the decision of the Tendulkar committee estimates as the new BPL line.

Speaking about the number of BPL families, Sandeep Pandey, Activist and Magsaysay award winner said "The government has not been able to prepare a correct BPL list and has caused immense hardship to people. That is why we want the BPL list be made like Employment Guarantee Scheme where people themselves go and register their names and that can only happen if there is a notional agreement on the principle of universal.

Towards the end of day 3, a huge contingent of people descended at the dharnasthal. They were from Satna, MP. This group was an extremely spirited lot which showed that despite stark poverty and hunger of the farming community, the spirit to fight could not be snatched away. Six hundred of them of the BKU led by Tripathiji, stated that despite being a drought affected district the Government of MP had not given the farming community any compensation. NREGA was run in a very feudal manner. They said that their food security was dependent on farming which was not being at all supported by the Government. They also wanted cheap rations and felt that the Government had failed to select the real poor in the BPL. This group also decided that they would do an all night protest. so they fought tooth and nail with the police when it tried to throw them out of Jantar Mantar. Finally, the police and the group reached a settlement with the mediation of the RTF people that they were kept in Ambedkar Bhawan for the night.



Day four of the Dharna saw mini India. Almost all the States seemed to be present. The groups from Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand spoke on the various struggles that were being waged by them to prevent being displaced although the Government in order to suppress their struggles was calling them Maoists. The operation Green Hunt of the GOI was also criticised openly by communities who came from these areas.

Rajasthan was represented in large numbers all through the five days. People came from the villages on India Pakistan border on one end and also from the borders of Gujarat and MP in large numbers. They spoke of how the ICDS centres were not working though they were aware of the importance of nutrition for their little children. also that the BPL lists were ten years old and new people were not being added. There was a clear demand for Universalisation of the PDS.

Representatives from Tamil Nadu said that NFSA with Rs.3 per kg grain would be a loss for the resident of the State as they obtained PDS rations for Rs. 1 per kg. They also spoke of the transparency model that was central to their system and felt that the rate of grain should be further lowered. Members from AP felt that while the battle for subsidised food may have been won to some extent in AP in terms of universality, however, the entitlement was very little just 20 kgs. They endorsed the demand of the campaign of getting at least 50 kgs grain per family from the PDS.

Women were represented in large numbers from Gujarat who spoke of how their struggles got the PDS shops to be accountable. However, they were very critical of flour that was being distributed through the PDS it was bad quality mostly. They also pushed for nutritious grains like Bajra and Maize in the PDS.

In the same evening, after a lot of resistance from the police, protesters made a human chain on the Jantar Mantar road. It was a pledge to make the Government realise that a comprehensive food entitlements Act was what they would take. The group from UP also came in large numbers from different parts of the State. Mostly, from central UP they shared their concerns about the limited rights that the Government was planning to enact through the NFSA.

Some of the slogans that were frequently raised at the dharna were:

- Abhi to li angdai hai aage aur ladai hai...
- Rastriya khadya asuraksha kanun ... band karo... band karo...
- Manmohan tere sashan, ghar-bar bik gaye ration main...
- Bhukhi janta kare guhar, kam kholo Bharat Sarkar.....
- Sarkar hamse darti hai, police ko aage karti hai.....
- Jan-Jan ka yahi hai nara, Bhojan ka adhikar kanun bane hamara....
- Bhojan ka adhikar kanun banao, desh bachao desh bachao.....
- Bhuk se janta marega, sarkar ka vote katega....
- Gaon Gaon me rahat kary kholo, nahi to apni kursi chodo...





On the final day, more than a hundred men and women from Punjab reached the dharna. Everybody was delighted as this state had never been represented earlier in the dharna. What was even more shocking was that the people spoke of wage rates as low as Rs.15 and 16 in agriculture work in some parts of the Punjab. They also said that despite the Punjab being the granary of the country there were at least 10 percent of the children's population that suffered from malnutrition and anaemia. Friends from Sahara Adhikar Manch helped us a lot with the final day coordination activities.

In the evening, the dharna concluded with a **Panel discussion**, which attracted an audience of more than 200 at Constitution Club. The discussion was chaired by Mr. Vinod Raina of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS). This panel discussion was planned as it was imperative that Political Parties state their position and also take up the issue in the ongoing session of Parliament.

Five parties were represented. They included Ms. Brinda Karat (CPI-M), Mr. Ali Anwar (JDU), Mr. Bardhan and Mr. D. Raja (CPI), Mr. Prakash Javdekar (BJP), (CPI) and Mr. Dharendra Jha (CPI-ML). Mr. Abhijit Sen (member, Planning Commission) was also one of the panelists. The right to food campaign was very pleased to have Mr. Renato Maluf (President, Brazilian National Council for Food and Nutrition, a constitutional body) share his views on the occasion. The discussion ended with a closing note by Mr. Harsh Mander (Special Commissioner appointed by Supreme Court for RTF Case). The overall voice from the entire panelist was in favour of the campaign demands.

Annie Raja of the NFIW welcomed all the participants. The meeting and the campaign was introduced by Dr. Vandana Prasad of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan. She spoke about the campaign's commitments of working towards a hunger-free India and the realisation of the Right to Food for All. She briefly shared information about the structure, the ten-month-old campaign for a comprehensive food entitlements act. She also gave an account of the last five days of protest at the Jantar Mantar.

Presentation on the National Food Security Act by Right to Food Campaign

Anuradha Talwar and Madhuri Krishnaswamy presented the major points of the campaign concerning the proposed food security act and proved the feasibility of universalization with specific calculations on the food grains and budgetary allocations for PDS. The presentation also emphasized that food security must ensure nutritional security and no food consumption and food production can be separated and hence NFSA should address both together. In fact, providing universal PDS under NFSA, can work towards reviving agriculture and food production. The presentation also suggested the inclusion of millets and pulses in the PDS, preference to local procurement and distribution of grains. Madhuri also added that the tax foregone (waived) by the Central Govt on Corporate Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Excise and Customs was Rs.5,02,299 crores in 2009-10 (79.54% of the aggregate tax collection), and it was Rs.4,14,099 crores (68.59% of aggregate tax collection) in 2008-9. (the budget documents caution that this might be an underestimation). *This is about 11 times the current food subsidy bill. Please refer to Annex 1 for the details of the presentation in brief.*

The entire presentation can be accessed at:

http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/food_security_what_the_government_says_and_what_we_want.pdf

Major demands highlighted during the presentation were:

- Remove APL BPL and the provision of subsidised food for all
- Nutritional security with per head monthly entitlements of 14 kgs of cereals, 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil
- Use the PDS to revitalise agriculture, by incentivising food production.
- Make procurement and distribution local and decentralised
- Children's right to food to be ensured.
- Social Security through the Old age pension, Maternity Entitlements and Family Pension be the only cash component.
- The Act should not reduce any of the entitlements of the Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food Case but go beyond them.
- Special rights for vulnerable and excluded
- Food cannot be replaced by cash transfers for food schemes like PDS, ICDS, and MDMS.
- Food entitlement cards in the name of women
- Effective grievance redressal mechanisms, with punishments, penalties and compensation
- Affirmative action for Dalits, Adivasis and other socially discriminated groups

Ms. Brinda Karat (CPI - M)

Brinda Karat thanked the RTFC for bringing forward the issue of food security. She further went on to discuss the present condition of the bill as one that takes advantage of people's vulnerability and that which would unleash food insecurity if passed. She criticized the bill for not discussing the Antyodaya, for excluding the needs of 'APL' families. She commented that 4000 crores would be saved by cutting the subsidy from Rs.35 to Rs. 25. Ascertaining the number of BPL families and clamping down on a number has become like a bargaining game, being levered against the poor. The government needs to recognize that a large number of people in this country have no permanent source of employment and focus on concrete demands. These should be a part of our preamble. She expressed her solidarity against price and the inclusion of salt, oil etc to ensure nutritional security. Our aim she said should be to introduce the bill at the earliest so that it is sent to the standing committee where our demands can be presented.

She called for a broad based alliance of all groups working on similar issues and also appealed to the Right to Food campaign to join the campaign initiated by left and other secular parties against prices and food security.

Mr. Ali Anwar (JDU)

He pledged his party's support for the cause, saying that the issue should be a priority on the agenda of political parties. The state's refusal to recognize the issue of malnutrition and starvation deaths in various states was a cause of deep concern. He also commented on the IPL and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Mr. Bardhan (CPI)

He expressed that it was heartening to see so many people attracted to the campaign, including economists, member of planning commission etc all gathered together. Similarly on march 5th, trade unions from across the country came together to demonstrate for common demands of food and social security. The government has turned away from addressing this universal question. In a country with fast escalating population, one cannot talk of food security without speaking of food production. One needs to keep in mind the key player - the farmer. He mentioned about the declining land under food production and added that we do need commercial crops but no place for ethanol. Cooperation between India, china and Brazil needs to increase. How much land to be given for industry, roadways etc needs to be discussed as a key issue. He commented on the rise in prices of commodities tied with agriculture such as fuel, fertilizers. He defined food security as providing sufficient, nutritious food to all at affordable prices. "Poverty line is an imaginary line" Arbitrary ways of identifying the poor, he added.

He however, advised the Right to food Campaign to transform itself into a movement and go beyond being a campaign as the issue of providing food for all was a fight which would not be accepted easily by the Government. Agitations which would force them to bow down to the demands of the people were needed.

Dr. Sunilam (Samajwadi Party) Dr. Sunilam, expressed solidarity for the campaigns demands individual food security, doing away with APL/BPL categorization for food subsidies and food security. He said that the socialists were always of the opinion that without the Right to Food and Work becoming fundamental Rights the freedom real of an individual could never be realised. He said his party agreed completely with the demands that were being made by the campaign and when it would come into the Parliament they would put their weight behind a Universal PDS.

Mr. Prakash Javdekar (BJP)



Mr. Javedkar mentioned about the post independence scenario saying it is such that basic rights such as food, water need to be fought for. Complete failure of a model of development. We will fight these battles, as your lawyers, inside and outside parliament. He affirmed his opposition to food coupons and cash transfers that don't take into account price rise. The mission is to eliminate malnutrition nationwide. He also spoke in favour of a universal PDS.

For more photographs, please click [here](#) .

Mr. D Raja (CPI)

Mr. D. Raja, who also visited the protesters at the dharna, supported the campaigners in their struggle. He mentioned about his double responsibility of representing the party, both inside and outside the parliament. There have been developments- a growing awareness and recognition among people of their rights, he added.

The govt that claims to work for the Aam admi, is going against their interest. The claim that there is mis match between supply and demand is no justification for the proposed bill. We have seen buffer

stock, bumper crops; new grain arriving and old grain rotting because of the lack of storage facilities. This is a failure on the part of the government to manage the grain economy.

He expressed his support for universalisation of the PDS, calling APL/BPL as deceptive. He also reiterated his party's commitment to take up the issue inside Parliament once the bill would be presented.

Mr. Dharendra Jha (CPIML)

He expressed his solidarity with the campaign. The debate on 'who is poor' and the post-mortems bring conducted on starvation deaths to prove them otherwise, is against the dignity of the poor.

Abhijit Sen (Planning commission)

(He said he was speaking not as a member of the planning commission but in his personal capacity)

He agreed with the campaign in so far that no right can be restrictive, and must be universal. In 2002, the BJP lead government, appointed a committee to study grain management, for which he was the chairman. The committee's clear recommendation was to universalize the PDS. However he cautioned against "making unreasonable demands" as this would elicit unreasonable responses. He added that the extremely poor should receive some benefits over others when asked about APL/BPL. To achieve real food security, it is important that the Supreme Court orders be converted in to rights and any non compliance be treated as a punishable offence.

Mr. Renato Maluf- President, Brazilian National council for food and nutrition

He spoke of the council of which he was a constitutional head. According to him it consisted of 38 members from civil society and 19 ministers. As food and nutritional security is multi dimensional, these ministers are from diverse sectors and governments such as health, agriculture, labour etc. The secretary gen. is elected from this body of ministers while the President is from the group of 38. The Council acts as an advisory body to the President of Brazil. Although Brazil was one of the few countries, where through a constitutional amendment, the right to food was a constitutional mandate. But there was still a long way to go in realising the access of food for all, he said. He spoke of the challenges of implementation and making the system more effective, in giving society the consciousness of this right. He stressed on the importance of nutritional security and food sovereignty as being essential to food security and complimented the Right to Food Campaign for connecting the issue of nutrition, food production and distribution in its proposed Act.

He also spoke of strengthening the relationship between the two campaigns. So he stated that a representative of the Right to Food Campaign from India had attended the last conference in Brazil on Food Security. He also stated that it was good to see the Governments of Brazil and India growing closer. However it was important that the Right to food campaign in India and the movements in Brazil have a close relationship and support each other in their countries and on Global platforms.

Closing

The panel discussion came to a close with Harsh Mander summarizing the demands of the campaign and discussing areas that had been left out due to paucity of time.

According to him the motivating factor behind the dharna was a vision of society to ensure that no human being should sleep hungry or be malnourished. He highlighted the issues of food production,

land improvement and the special needs of children- breastfeeding, crèches etc and the need to focus on vulnerable sections of society who have found no place in existing schemes and programmes.

Post Dharna

A decision was taken to meet the Prime Minister and the Food and Agriculture Minister, all members of the Empowered group of Ministers (EGOM) for the NFSA and all leaders of Political Parties.

Before Dharna Happened, on 12th April, our delegation met with AK Anthony who agreed that NFSA in its present form of 25kgs for BPL families at Rs. 3 was very limited in its scope and that it needed to be broadened. He also agreed that Court order was for 35 kgs per family and that the Act could definitely not give less than this. Also said that he knew from his experience as a Chief Minister that BPL quotas from the Centre caused real problems for the State Governments and therefore the BPL issue needed to be looked at properly. Felt that universalization was problematic because they did not have enough food grains.

During the dharna, on 16th April, another campaign delegation met Mr. Dayanidhi Maran (Textile Minister and an EGoM member), where it was observed that the Minister was interested in concrete figures and not general policy approach. He said he would brief Minister on universalisation demand.

On the 20th Mr. Sharad Pawar met us and heard the Campaign representatives. He promised to share this with the other EGOM members. He stated that he himself was opposed to cash transfers and State's were not keen to pick up nutritious grains like Bajra, Jowar and Maize. However, about the demand for a Universal PDS he was silent.

Another delegation also met Mr. Murlidhar Rao (ex convenor of Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and BJP leader) who told us that no stand had yet been taken within the BJP on universalisation. This was something that had to still be discussed and internalised within the party. He was personally supportive of universal coverage and linking revival of agriculture with the PDS. Wanted to know from us if we saw any role for traditional community bodies like temples, maths etc in food security. Discussed such a probable role with him in terms of Government providing grain etc. to such bodies to do relief work after disasters or to run community kitchens for the hungry, but we said that even in such arrangements the State must still be accountable to the people, and such organisations must also be accountable to the state.

Rajnath Singh (MP and BJP leader) seemed very concerned about the rotting grain and inefficiency in PDS. He accepted the idea of universalisation and increased procurement to improve situation of farmers. Felt general Government attitude was anti farmer and anti poor. Supportive of inclusion of children's right to food.

On the same day, campaign delegation met with Arun Jaitley (MP and BJP leader) and put forward main recommendations of Wadhwa commission. On universalisation/expansion of PDS beyond present BPL quotas, he was appreciative of the need for this. He promised to get back to us when debate on NFSA came up

Acknowledgement

The dharna would not have been possible without the hard work of CFAR and other friends and ensure its coverage in the media. The Delhi groups Shahari Adhikar Manch for their support in looking after stay arrangements, NCDHR that took the task of photocopying materials, and Sanjha Manch, Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan the Delhi Forces, Delhi Sramik Sangathan, jagori, IGSSS, AIKSM, Action AID network, NFIW women (all Delhi groups) and the Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan group from Phagi in Jaipur District Rajasthan for their fantastic contribution through songs, plays and keeping the spirits of the dharna high. Had it not been for the NFIW's constant interventions with the police the daily dharna would not have gone off smoothly, especially like the provision of several tanks of water for the entire day, Delhi Forces and Mobile Creches for taking care of the arrangements for the meeting at the Constitutional Club and all the groups who participated and made this possible. .

Campaign in media

- **All the newspaper cuttings of the media can be accessed here:**

<http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/MediaCoverageOfDharna15thTo19thApril#>

- Right to Food Campaign opposes proposed Food Security Bill - By: Anand Verma

[http://www.mynews.in/News/Right to Food Campaign opposes proposed Food Security Bill N41529.html](http://www.mynews.in/News/Right%20to%20Food%20Campaign%20opposes%20proposed%20Food%20Security%20Bill%20N41529.html)

- Public protest against proposed Food Insecurity Act from today

HINDUSTAN TIMES%20<http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/Protest-over-food-security-bill-tomorrow/531440/H1-Article1-531249.aspx%20>

- [Protest over food security bill Thursday | Inditop,](#)

- <http://www.newkerala.com/news/fullnews-89710.html>

- [http://www.twocircles.net/2010apr14/protest over food security bill thursday.html](http://www.twocircles.net/2010apr14/protest%20over%20food%20security%20bill%20thursday.html)

- <http://mizoramexpress.com/index.php/2010/04/public-protest-to-expose-the-proposed-food-insecurity-act-from-today/>

- <http://www.dailyindia.com/show/370150.php>

- <http://zolengthe.net/2010/04/15/public-protest-in-delhi-to-expose-the-proposed-food-insecurity-act/>

- <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2010/04/16/protest-alert-food-debate-simmers-in-delhi/>

- **Protests over bills mark parliament opening day -**

http://www.khabarexpress.com/print_story.asp?newsID=150800

- **Protest Alert: Food Debate Simmers in Delhi**

Wall Street Journal, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2010/04/16/protest-alert-food-debate-simmers-in-delhi/>

- <http://blog.taragana.com/law/2010/04/17/activists-seek-changes-in-food-security-bill-21529/>
- <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20100417/812/tnl-activists-seek-changes-in-food-secur.html>
- <http://www.prokerala.com/news/articles/a129190.html>
- http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/food-security-bill-distressing-ngo-tells-pm_100339328.html
- <http://www.newkerala.com/news/fullnews-91443.html>
- <http://www.mynews.in/News/Activists seek changes in food security bill N47533.html>
- <http://yahindnews.com/uncategorized/activists-seek-changes-in-food-security-bill.html>
- **NGOs protest proposed National Food Security Act**
<http://news.oneindia.in/2010/04/17/ngosprotest-proposed-national-food-securityact.html>
- **People's protests: Feed the poor :** <http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/peoples-protests-feed-the-poor-20261.php>
- **Down to Earth -**
http://www.downtoearth.org.in/full6.asp?foldername=20100430&filename=news&sec_id=4&sid=3
- <http://www.hindustantimes.com/special-news-report/rssfeed/New-figure-for-poor-372-million/Article1-532722.aspx>
- <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/100-million-more-Indians-now-living-in-poverty/articleshow/5829267.cms>
- <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/37.2-per-cent-of-population-bpl-10-crore-families-to-get-food-security/607963/2>
- <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sonia-effect-Plan-panel-raises-BPL-bar/articleshow/5826309.cms>
- http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_planning-commission-accepts-suresh-tendulkar-s-estimates-on-number-of-poor_1372625
- <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/egom-to-decidepoverty-estimate/392494/>
- <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/BPL-math-may-hold-up-food-security-efforts/articleshow/5834160.cms>
- <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Line-dancing/608140>

- Photographs of this event can be accessed at <http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/DharnaAgainstDraftFoodSecurityAct201015thAprilTo19thApril>

Annex I: Note on food grains and budgetary requirements

Requirement of Food

Using ICMR norms for moderately active male (2700 calories required)

- Cereals (including millets)- 14 kgs per month or 50 kgs per family
- Edible Oil 800 grams per month or 2.8 kgs per family
- Pulses 1.5 kgs per head per month or 5.25 kgs per month

Quantity of Foodgrains required

(In million tonnes)

	Cereals	Pulses	Edible Oils
Entitlement per month / household (in kgs)	50 kgs	5.25 kgs	2.8 kgs
Universal Public Distribution System (20 crore* families assuming 100% off take)	120.0	12.6	6.7
Universal (assuming 80% off take)	96.0	10.1	5.4
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	92.4	9.7	5.2
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	60.0	6.3	3.4
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	44.4	4.7	2.5

- Assuming a population of about 100 crores i.e. 20 crore families (average family size of 5)

(in percentage)	families	Cereals	Pulses	Edible Oils
Universal Public Distribution System (20 crore families)	200	65.8	88.1	82.0
Universal (assuming 80% offtake)	160	52.7	70.5	65.6
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	154	50.7	67.8	63.1
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	100	32.9	44.1	41.0
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	74	24.4	32.6	30.3

Production of Food:

Production (in million tonnes)	Total cereals (minus 12.5% for seed, feed, wastage)*	Total Pulses*	Net availability of edible oils from all domestic sources**
2005-06	170.8	13.39	8.31
2006-07	177.7	14.2	7.37
2007-08	189.0	14.76	8.65
2008-09	191.8	14.66	8.60
Average of four years production	182.3	14.3	8.2

* Source: "Agricultural Statistics at a Glance, 2009", Ministry of Agriculture

** Source: Annual Report, 2009, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Economic Survey, 2009, Government of India

Cost of cereals

	For 50 kgs/ family/month
Economic weighted average of wheat and rice cost per kg (in Rs.)	16
Proposed per kg price in NFSA (in kgs)	3
Net subsidy per kg (in kgs)	13
Number of kgs per month (in kgs)	50
Subsidy per month per family (in Rs.)	650

Annual subsidy per family (in Rs.)	7800
For universal PDS for 20 crore families	1,56,000
(rupees crores)	
Assuming 70% off take	109200
Assuming 80% off take	124800
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	120120
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	78000
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	57720

Availability of funds

Compared to many wealthy nations including USA, Sweden etc. India has very a low tax GDP ratio (around 18% compared to 28% for USA and around 45-50% for Scandinavian countries).

Even this very low rate is not realized. The tax foregone (waived) by the Central Govt on Corporate Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Excise and Customs was **Rs.5,02,299 crores** in 2009-10 (79.54% of the aggregate tax collection), and it was **Rs.4,14,099 crores** (68.59% of aggregate tax collection) in 2008-9 (the budget documents caution that this might be an underestimation).

This is about 11 times the current food subsidy bill.

Corporate income tax foregone is **Rs 79,554**, almost Rs 13,000 more than last year. Every year, the effective tax rate is a merely around 22% compared to the statutory tax rate of 33.99%. The largest companies, those with more than Rs 500 crores, get the most exemptions. Public sector companies pay much higher taxes than private sector companies.

In Excise duties, instead of the tariff rate of 16%, only 8% excise duties were levied.

In Customs duties foregone, the exemptions for diamonds, gold and jewelry were as high as Rs 39,769 crores.

(Source: Statement of Revenues Forgone, Budget 2010, available at indiabudget.nic.in)

This is almost the same as the entire budget allocation for NREGA.

Meeting with Dr. Vandana Prasad

The insightful discussion that I had with Dr. Vandana gave me a lot of information as to how JSA has been connected and been a part of RTF campaign all along. Availability and affordability of food always plays an important role in meeting nutritional needs of a person and so far what all I've seen of the organizations working on health, most of them invariably get into the issues of ICDS and PDS. Though Dr. Vandana and two more JSA members formally act as representatives to the RTF, a lot of people that I've come to know and that have been the key contributors to the campaign are also associated with JSA. The discussion also helped me understanding the dynamics of the campaign and could get more suggestions on the people that I can meet with. One observation I could find from this discussion and a few others with different people is the lack of participation in the campaign from the groups that are associated with agricultural issues. Though the campaign demands the policy changes with in the food production side as well, not many grassroot organizations are found connected that are struggling for food production issues.

National consultation on Developing Socio-medical tools for early identification of acute hunger & starvation of effective administrative action – Organized by JNU and Supreme Court Commissioner's office (for Right to food case)

A lot of representatives from institutions such as JNU, NIN, AIIMS etc had come over to discuss the technicalities of the starvation and it's grading. Apart from that it also had participation from few other groups in delhi and grassroots across different parts of country. Here I could see what can happen when you have a mix of academics and grassroots. The priorities differe a lot for both these groups. As the consultation intended more to figure out better tools for identifications of starvation, it revolved around definitions and technicalities in medical terms. Many of the participants kept their points as to how the starvation deaths are wrongly dismissed by the administration as deaths due to illness or infection. It often happens that those who are more action oriented sometimes fail to see the importance of digging deep into technicalities. The very administration that can dismiss the starvation deaths with their own technical reasons, needs to be given the taste of their own medicine and hence that's when some of the insights into the medical definitions and technicalities help. One important outcome, to my observation, was that everyone present seem to agree on the minimum calory requirements for anyone to be said as going through starvation should be below 1200 Kcal, as opposed to WHO suggested 850 Kcal, which is unrealistic. Other than that, I felt such consultations, with people coming from diverse disciplins, tend to loose the focus of the discussion many a times.

'Koi Bhukha na soye abhiyan'

I happened to attend the first half of the meeting that was arranged to flag off the new campaign parallel to the Right to food. 'Koi bhukha na soye abhiyan' is facilitated by Lokayan, a group of Gandhian activists in Delhi. The combination of participations in this meeting was also more on Gandhian side, with Gandhi Peace Foundation as venue and the discussions went on throughout in Hindi. Overall the first half that I happened to attend contained the introduction to the issue of food in India by Dr Vandana Prasad, Swamiji from Arya Samaj, Dr. Ritu Priya, Lokayan representatives and other state representatives. I am still confused on the need of the second campaign, and not too clear on their agenda and how they are going to work along with the existing campaign.

Public hearing for starvation deaths – Gaya/Bihar

For me, the journey to Gaya from Delhi will stand memorable, as it was the first of its kind where I travelled without any ticket by train and as if that wasn't enough the train was late by some 14 hours! The public hearing too was very good learning for me, as it gave me first hand view of the discussions I witnessed at the consultaiton held by JNU earlier in the month. [The full details of the public hearing is already there in the different report, hence I'll only capture my personal observations here.] The situation in Bihar from what I observed, looked worse than any other state. The mid-day meal, which generally works better than the rest of the schemes, too has been failing in this state. According to Rupeshji, advisor to Supreme court commissioners in Bhiar, a number of fact finding reports had been sent to commissioners, which was also followed by visits of Harsh Mander a few years back and even after being given regular orders, the situation hadn't improved, and the public hearing which was held was the result of all those years of follow ups. Most of all the deaths that were reported were from those blocks where there was a complete failure of the social welfar schemes, including NREGA and health facilities. Moreover all the deaths were ruled out, as per ADM, as deaths due to illness or infection, based on post-mortem reports. Harsh Mander's presence made a big difference though. The members of burocracy kept pouring in, on his orders. CDPO, ADM, BDO and even DDC were there to face his questions.

My own dilemma

What makes me wonder is, why should it take a commissioner to visit the place for the district officers to be present in the hearing and to give assurances that things will be better? The presence of Harsh Mander or BHRC representatives (Shri Rajendra Prasad) did make a difference, but one can't expect them to be visiting every district to have equal presence from the burocracy. This indeed has made me thinking about where things should end, and what should be the

role of civil society in the long run for any of the issues, be it health, food or education. Any new scheme or act we get, in the end, onus comes on to civil society to make sure it works better, be it PDS, ICDS, NRHM, NREGA, RTI, Acts for domestic violence or even latest RTE. Agreed that some amount of monitoring from outside is necessary and helps to strengthen system, but all the groups so far I've found have been busy in monitoring these schemes and in the end when problems have been found, most time dharna, rally or hunger fasts are used as tools for registering their protests, which most time fails. In my view, the role of any civil society group should be more on strengthening the policy than acting as watchdog for every minute social welfare scheme. But as of now, I see the act of being a watchdog taking primary role and very few are actually involved with policy part. With whatever reading and exposing that I've got, I fail to see any improvement in recent future to this, which feels very depressing at times. This has made me seriously deliberate on what should be the real solution to the present situation and whether I'm on the right track that's targeting at such solution or not.

Visit to Harola Basti at Sector 5, Noida where Mobile Creche works

Mobile Creches (<http://www.mobilecreches.org/>) has been doing a good work with ICDS in Delhi and one basti in Noida. I happened to visit their Noida basti where in they have been working since 2004. Ganga, who's supposedly the community leader and Krishna, who is the supervisor from Mobile Creches, showed me around. They had started in 2004, with awareness generation using puppets, street theatre, songs etc, related to child care, after which a few interested women gathered for the child care training. Some 5 balwadis were setup after that with those trained women and in parallel they were also exploring the anganwadi setup from the Noida authority. In fact it was the women's group in the community that went to Noida authority with the complaint letter asking for anganwadis to be setup in their basti. After one year of consistent followup at present, they have 3 anganwadis and one balwadi (by MC), in the basti. The women who were trained by MC, become AWW later on. However due to more number of kids, they still required a balwadi, for which they were charging nominal fees for one kid. The awareness levels have increased in the community, as Krishna mentions, basti women had started questioning her for this fees saying that the government doesn't charge anything for anganwadis!

AID volunteers in Noida have been running an education center where they try to get the drop-out students back to school after teaching them for sometime. Their community room's not as such utilized so much during the noon time, so seeing MC's work I thought of connecting AID volunteers so that they can get help with running a similar creche in the existing community rooms. The Nayabans center where AID volunteers work, doesn't have any anganwadi and so far from what I've inquired, the basti is not formally registered. Naya Bans village (which is besides basti) however does have one anganwadi (with population of roughly 4000 families) but that officially doesn't cater to the urban basti. After visiting MC's basti, I went to Noida authority office for more information on ICDS, only to find that concerned CDPO was on leave. I shall follow up on that next week now.

Bangalore visit in the month of June

That was the first visit of sharing after 2 months of field work for the fellows and it indeed proved its purpose and helped me learn from my co-fellows. Apart from which it also provided me with two major learning out of the various workshops and sessions arranged during that time. First was not to take community presence for granted for 'your' task or agenda. I have thereafter always been cautious when I take time from any of the village-dweller for my own learning or set agenda. Second was the presentation on tobacco, which was full with interesting information. But sadly when I went to the rural areas after the 10 days stay I realized how hard it is to reduce tobacco consumption. More than that the fact that many health activists taking tobacco was more unbelievable for me at the first go. I still can't fathom as to why all those well-aware people and specially those working in the field of public health find it hard to get rid of their habit of smoking.

NAC consults Right to Food campaign members at Delhi for National Food Security Act

Since there are many members of Right to food campaign on NAC this time, it was decided to have consultation with right to food campaign member regarding food security bill. I had handled responsibility of preparing campaign material for each of the members. During the meeting Madhuri Krishnaswami from JADS started it off with detailed demands and understanding of food security act on behalf of the campaign. Each of the members then presented on various issues related to food security and problems of different sections such as children, vulnerable groups etc. There weren't too many comments from the NAC members though.

After the consultation I also spent a few days training the new girl that was going to work as secretariat coordinator for the campaign.

At Bhopal CPHE

Before heading to Barwani, I stayed at CPHE Bhopal for 5 days where I met 2-3 fellows of MP fellowship and had informal discussions with them about their experiences, that could give me some insights of the organizations that they are working with.

Other part of my plan during Bhopal stay was to meet a few people there. I couldn't not find too many available though. Sachin Jain from Vikas Samvad, who also happens to be the advisor to supreme court for the right to food case, helped me understand the scenario with MP right to food campaign and provided me with the latest study done for the commissioners office for the next report. It was shocking to find out that MP only provides 20kg of food grains at max to all BPL card holders. He also provided me with data and facts that shown some effectiveness of the right to food case in MP.

I also met Narendra Gupta from Action AID, who gave me more or less similar information but also explained me how the MP right to food campaign has been functioning since its beginning. Well it did give me an insightful look into the right to food campaign to some extent, but the conversation did not go further due to time constraints.

Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan, Barwani

JADS in Barwani, was perhaps the first community exposure of its kind where in I stayed for more than 4-5 days, and actually stayed with Adivasis in their huts and tried to get a feel of their daily routine life. It provided me with learnings that I will stay memorable forever.

After reaching barwani and having an initial discussion with Madhuri about JADS and its work, I went to the Jilla meeting of the sangathan with her in Kandra village. The marathon meeting, that went on till two days, was something that showed the commitment the adivasis had towards their causes and struggle, which kept them running irrespective of any situation. Be it burning heat or soaking rain, the meeting would go on, people would come forward and put forth their concerns, issues for further discussion and the struggle would go on.

Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan (JADS), started approximately 10 years back. It was a part of Adivasi Mukti Sangathan before that. But due to some of the internal disputes, people were repelled with the working style of AMUS and that triggered JADS, initially with Pati block. Now it's also operating in Panchsemal and Barwani blocks. The sangathan is membership based and each member contributes an annual fees of Rs 60. Although it hasn't been collected for last 2 years, the majority of the expenses of the sangathan is taken care of through this collection. There are a few members that are elected as village, block and zilla level karyakartas by people themselves. None of them are being paid as of now and all the work is being done by members and people totally on volunteer basis. Although Madhuri does understand the limitation of this model but she feels that people ultimately need to decide if they wish to pay any karyakarta to work fulltime for the sangathan.

The kandra meeting witnessed a lot of discussions amongst people from different villages and blocks, who also shared their success and failure stories with each other. The meeting went non-stop till late night on the first day. Most time without Madhuri. There also were some focused group discussions amongst men and women differently. On the second day, they discussed the next strategy for the sangathan. Apart from inspiring commitment from people, I also observed good sense of discipline. Though illiterate, they knew how to conduct large meetings, sticking to their agenda, appointing some literate person to take notes and maintaining a bit of code of conduct during the discussions.

The language that's spoken majorly is 'Barli', which to me sounds like a mix of Hindi-Marathi-Gujarati. The dialect changes with the region too. Panchsemal block, which is near to Maharashtra, has more Marathi in it. Even the clothing of adivasis were different, for those belong to bukreta or panchsemal.

Because the native language of the adivasis is 'Barli', the kids of Barwani always face problems in Government schools, where in they are taught in Hindi. Moreover in blocks like Pati and Bukreta, where several parts are too high on the hills, the geographical constraints are roadblocks for kids to reach to their schools. The sangathan thus, decided to build a school of their own in the lines of another school 'Aadharsheela' in Sendhwa block. The small hut of the school was built by adivasis themselves; hence it saved the labour cost. Two teachers from the community with nominal qualification had been identified, who are being paid from sangathan collection. The informal residential school tries to teach kids in Barli first then slowly get on to hindi so that they can gradually understand the teaching of government

schools if and when they are admitted into one. At present, school has 40 kids residing inside it and the food for them is also being prepared by the family of one of the teacher, with the grains supplied by their parents. They have also formed a school committee that takes care of all the problems and matters that concerns school. They have named it as 'Aazadi Siksha Kendra'.

The sangathan has also started initiative for collecting and preserving native seeds. As a result, there was a collection drive which yielded in numerous native seeds in the seed bank of the sangathan. With the help of seeds available from horticulture department, they also have plans to start kitchen gardens during monsoon. Somehow they still haven't been able to procure native cotton seeds, as most places I saw people growing Bt cotton, though they do understand the adverse consequences of it. Most time the reason explained by people was non availability of native seeds. Except cotton being grown by a few members who owns wells, most of the aadivasis grow makka and jowar for their own consumption.

Years ago, they themselves had taken up watershed programs in the villages which were extremely successful with shram-daan from villagers themselves. Being a hilly region, conservation of water and aforestation has become very important from them. Pati block, which used to be a densely forested area some 25 years back, now looks miserably de-forested. People do accept that a tiny percentage of it is also removed by themselves for their houses and agriculture, but most part of it is taken off by the forest department illegally for the industries. When it was raining everywhere in MP, hills of barwani stayed thirsty. People have understood the importance of forest, and hence there have been efforts to grow trees. Kids studying in the school have taken this as one of the assignment and more than 100 trees had been planted near the school itself. Other blocks too have done a tree plantation drive, some of it through NREGA too. JADS activists had played an important role in the struggle of NREGA, and people of barwani see NREGA as their right to livelihood and also a tool to develop their own village, their farms and land, water sources and forests. Almost everyone is an activist in itself when it comes to problems with NREGA. People now know their way out to the solutions, and strategies of struggle.

During the meeting in Kandra people had decided to revive the sangathan efforts with series of meetings in all the villages. A committee was formed in each kshetra with 9 members in it from different villages. Every day the meeting would be arranged in one village and all the 9 members would go in there to witness it. I had then attended such meeting in Sawariya pani, Kandra and Bukreta villages. During these meetings people put their problems, sometimes even personal or family troubles, up for discussion. In all the meeting, discipline was once again exemplary. However intense the discussion goes, there won't be any sense of agitation in people. A lot of people during the meetings were bold enough to criticize the internal problems with sangathan too and all of them were taken in their right spirit. I was impressed by orating skills of many of them who did good job of motivating the rest of the crowd to stay united and fight for their rights.

Since these blocks are majority of forest areas with some patches of revenue land, people have been trying to get their land ownerships under Forests Rights Act (FRA) for a few years now. The land disputes between revenue and forest land are frequent and one question often raised is, that the dalits (who are actually aadivasi, but not recognized in government data) don't get the ownership of their land even when they are in forest area. I was surprised to find the extent of unity in people when I heard one

aadivasi, who asked if there's any difference in our blood? If not, then why this differential treatment for both of the castes? Aadivasis, who have their houses in revenue land and farms in forest land also face a lot of issues in getting ownership of their land and houses.

Other than these, Sangathan also focus on issues of ration. To avoid the corruption, all the women generally go to the society together to get the ration. The BPL list that was revised in a recent survey got many people out of the list. An application was made with signatures of all such people as per one of the Supreme Court orders and as a result, recently all those people got themselves back on the BPL list. Aanganwadis do function there, but the difficult geography doesn't generally permit villagers to drop their kids to anganwadis on daily basis. Many do get take-home rations though.

The health situation is troublesome in the area. It's not the case of awareness but the access to the services is difficult. Saathi, one of the NGO working in barwani, has taken up awareness generation for the health services in the sangathan people. Saathi started with training rural women as community health workers, calling them 'swasthya-saathi'. They were trained to handle approximately 12 diseases and earlier were using medicines supplied by LOCOST. With NRHM, they were all made ASHAs. Villagers don't find it favorable though. For them, now ASHAs have been loaded by NRHM's own agenda. Instead of 12, now they only take care of 6 diseases. Still they do provide significant health services to villagers. Other than that, SAATHI also tries to put health as an issue in the Sangathan's meetings. If needed people also arrange dharna and protests for addressing some of the issues. One such dharna they arranged for CHC in barwani where in Saathi had a doctor of their own sitting outside CHC, re-checking the patients coming out of it, to ensure they are diagnosed properly by the doctor inside it.

I also went to Aadharsheela, a school run by Jayashri and Amit in Sendhwa block. Basic concept was to educate kids who are coming from aadivasi background, most of whom fail at understanding hindi at the first place with government schools. The school initially teaches kids in Barli, and then shifts to hindi gradually. The teaching is done through alternate education methods. The school that's been running for last 10 years, now is fairly developed with multiple classes, library and computer room etc. They also have their own garden to grow most of the vegetables. The running cost of the school is taken care of by the fees of kids and grains given by parents for their meals. Other than that, they do accept funds of the infrastructural expenses.

Towards the end of my stay, one of the oldest karyakarta Valsingbhai was arrested on false charges of robbery. This [article](#) in The hindu rightly captures the gist of it. Soon after the news was spread, a meeting of major karyakartas was arranged in one of the village, and it was decided that protests will be held at 6 police stations. People held individual block level meetings too. I went to bukhreta meeting, where most of the aadivasis had walked over 4 hours in the morning to reach the place. People then decided to protest at 6 of the police stations asking for Valsingbhai's bail. The case was up for hearing in Sendhwa court soon. The SP that Madhuri met for the bail, proudly told her stories of how he had killed people from both sides during some hindu-muslim riots so hence he was not worried as to how many people protest for this. Later the protests were held at places, but unfortunately I had to leave for the Rourkela convention before that. Madhuri had to give convention a miss due to this emergency.

A brief discussion with NBA karyakartas

On the day when I was leaving back for Bhopal, I went to NBA office where I found Srikant and other Karyakartas, most of them were from the submergence area and working with NBA for more than 15 years. Through that I came to know a little bit about the struggle that people went through after displacement and issues that were faced for compensation thereafter. Now that the dam will take its final shape with full height, it's expected that a part of Barwani town will be submerged. Later in the day, I was accompanied by a few of the Karyakartas Devsingji and Kailashji to Indore from Barwani, wherein they enthusiastically narrated many success stories of their struggle (most of which due to lack of note-taking, I can't recall now). For all of them, Medhaji was a hero whom they wouldn't get tired of praising

Bhopal – NAPM organized meeting on Energy scenario in India

A national level meeting by NAPM (National Alliance of People's Movements) was organized in Bhopal to discuss Energy scenario in India and its impact on environment, health and human lives. The meeting focused mostly on the thermal and hydel power plants. It was started with a briefing by Medhaji, who emphasized on baseless projections on 'needs' of new power plants and skewed definition of development. It will also be unfair to consider that only thermal or hydel power plants affect lives of people, and all the other renewable sources are fair. One should also look at the displacements due to wind farms and centralized solar plants. In fact building new powerplants without considering huge transmission and distribution losses of existing ones will be fruitless. Distribution itself, at this point is grossly unequal and major consideration should be a just access to people living in all types of geographies. Environment too is abused to a large extent with such definition of development, and most times not even considered while making so-called development plans. It's claimed that India has achieved 1.5 lac MW power as its overall production capacity, but the fact that more than 30% of it is lost in T&D can't be concealed. Hydro-power is these days projected as clean and cheap but no one considers the environmental impacts of dams to animals, land, forest and ground water; let alone disruption of large number of human lives due to displacement and floods. Strategies to tackle all these problems have to be multifold from local to international level.

The meeting then started with a heart-breaking video done by a journalist on recent killings at Sompeta where people protested against power plant by Nagarjuna construction company for their land. The video was created by getting short clips from various mainstream media, the clips that were suppressed and never made it to people. It was quite disturbing to see the police along with goons of company shooting and lathi-charging people ruthlessly.

The presentation by energy expert Mr. Shankar Sharma (who happens to have more than 30 years experience with power sector) was also quite interesting. He uncovered all the issues with thermal power plants and environmental impacts of the power sector overall, with enough statistics. Today also the data from Ministry of power says that more than 80% households are not having enough access to electricity. It seems that energy generation through coal itself has too many losses. In addition humongous amount of water is consumed in generation of steam for steam turbine, and cooling of the

turbine. Methan emissions out of coal particles are also quite high and if we count the forests that are cut and degeneration due to it, and also the mining of the coal, total emissions due to generation of electricity due to coal counts to 53% in India (as per his presentation). 40% of the coal used to generate the electricity is converted into ash. For eg., 1200MW powerplant requires daily 600 tonnes of coal per hour and generates 150 metric tonnes of ash per hour. Most places, this ash is untreated and one can see large mountains of ash in some places that pollutes the surroundings and goes with rain water during monsoon. A lot of thermal powerplants in MP are now importing coal from outside (reasons stated are bad quality of locally available coal). A lot of members from different states staging similar protests, shared their findings and experiences from their states. The so-called argument of employment too fails in this case, as the operational employment per powerplant is only approx. 300 skilled personal, wherein most locals don't get anything as they are unskilled labour. Investment of 15-20 crore yields hardly one job here. Moreover a lot of electricity is eaten away by industry illegally and blame is generally thrown on rural people for stealing electricity. Rivers too are being sold for such projects, e.g. some of the power plants such as Adani have separate dams being constructed only to supply water to them.

The second day of the meeting comprised of discussions on future strategies. Shakarji presented the Alternative Energy Policy, emphasizing more on distributed system of solar energy. Again a lot of tasks that were done with human energy have now turned into electricity consuming tasks. One should get back to the traditional modes instead. People discussed future strategies and further tasks and made teams of volunteers who will look into those tasks in coming months. Also a note stating the overall position of everyone on the issue was prepared and sent out to the press. Taking benefit of the media that was present, I also gave the note of valsingbhai's arrest to them.

National convention for Right to food and work – at Rourkella, Orissa – 6th to 8th August

After the Bhopal meeting, I headed towards Rourkella for the Right to food National convention. I had planned to reach 2 days back and had booked my trains likewise. But I did not realize that my train would not run during the night. The trains to Howra have been stopped running during the night for certain routes and the train I took, Gnaneshwari express was the very train that had faced the blast. Hence I had to spend my night at Bhusaval railway station waiting room and could only reach Rourkella there by 5th morning. I later logged a complaint to irctc internet booking helpdesk, for putting up the changed train timings.

I met a number of people at the convention and made a few good friends, moreover that was one of the rare place where the busy bees of RTF could have a little bit of recreation. The 3 day meeting went too busy for a lot of us who were involved with organizing the show, and though I had picked up the workshops I wanted to attend before hand, I couldn't make much presence in any of those workshop. But plenary sessions were very enlightening and its worth noticing that almost every speaker at plenary tried to put emphasize on the larger picture of food security rather than a few kilos of grains as entitlements. Forest & tribal rights, privatization, industrialization (& mining) and their impact on food security were the highlighted as critical issues by almost every one of them. I particularly found talks of Gladson gungdung and Dayamani Barla very much enlightening. I along with a few more volunteers have

now been working on the full report of the convention. Notes are being collected from everyone and put in one place. Hopefully it should be out in a few days.

Sangathan of people displaced by bargi dam

From Rourkella, I planned to go to the sangathan of people who were displaced by Bargi dam to understand issues of displacement. I felt the need to understand this a little more after the discussions I had with NBA folks. Later I had met Rajkumar Sinha from Bargi at Bhopal meeting and hence decided to visit his sangathan for a few days. I stayed in Bargi, and visited the villages of the sangathan for 5 days.

Bargi comes under Jabalpur district and is 2 hours away from the Jabalpur city. From Rourkella, I had to go to Jabalpur via Bilaspur. Only 5 hours of train journey from Rourkella to Bilaspur showed glimpses of destruction that can happen due to mining and industrialization, and explains the issues with Orissa and Chattisgarh. Just from the small window of the train, enroute I saw more than 6 coal loading places, Ash Mountains and more than 5 big industrial plants, grossly polluting the land & water in the surroundings as well as air. The wrong estimations by the irrigation department had also resulted into over-acquisition of the land. Over 150 acre of land was stayed unused after being acquired and hasn't given back to people who owned it. Some of them have anyway started cultivation there even after a lot of threats by the concerned officials, but rourmers are doing rounds that this land will be used for the garden by tourism department. People are also hearing about plans of a national park on the reservoir, which will again displace them.

After reaching Rajkumarji's house in Bargi I first studied the report of Human cost of Bargi dam. Bargi was the first dam built as series of Narmada Dam projects. The work that was conceptualized in 1968 was started in 1974 and completed in 1990, making it 20 years at present for the dam. Initial plant states that expected irrigation should be 2.98 lac Ha but today after 20 years, It provides irrigation to little over 9000 Ha of land. The work of two left and right main canals are not even completed, let alone sub canals. The total cost was estimated initially as 69 Crores and was escalated to 566.31 crores in 1989, excluding canal cost (1665.60cr). The 26797 ha reservoir of the dam ended up displacing more than 7000 Families (over 35000 people approx.) from 162 villages of Mandla, Jabalpur and Seoni districts (out of which 82 villages were completely submerged and 8478 Ha or forest land was gone). Most of the displaced were forced to dwell in slums of Jabalpur, some have gone to Patan Tehsil of Jabalpur, Gotegaon in Narsinhpur and even to Baigachak districts in search of work after losing their land. Many people have been displaced multiple times due to miscalculations. A few hills have become islands and some people are still staying there and commuting with boats. The compensation for private land was meager and mostly wasn't given. Even those who had money to buy a tiny piece of land couldn't buy as land prices due to dam were suddenly escalated. The refugees of the peripheral forest land were fined and harassed by the forest departments. I was accompanied to the dam by one of the sangathan karyakarta and was mesmerized seeing the size of the reservoir, which enabled me to imagine what a massive destruction would it have been. Later next day I also visited to villages of Jabalpur and met a

few members of fishermen co-operative that was formed by sangathan to help generate livelihoods for some of the displaced.

Next day I went to villages of Mandla district along with Shardaji - another karyakarta, which has witnessed highest amount of displacement. It took 4 hours to reach Tatighat village (Narayanganj Vikaskhand). The direct route length to this place from bargi is approx. 35 kms, but due to the dam reservoir, it has now increased to 100 kms. I had some informative discussions with Shardaji enroute where he explained me about his initiatives of organic farming in Mandla district. After getting training for a few farmers from a place in Maharashtra, they had converted to organic farming and this is now 5th year for some 40 farmers in Mandla district. A lot of them weren't using chemical and already using cowdung, but he mentions that the method wasn't inefficient, and hence the yield could improve with some systematic changes. A lot of the farmers in Mandla whose land was gone in the dam had settled and started using some unoccupied land in the uphill areas and today they have been able to get the ownership of those land under forest rights act. It seems they did cut the forest in the agony of losing their land, but again Shardaji mentions, they were careful enough in not cutting bigger trees. One quarter a year when the water level of the dam goes down, some of the land that is freed of water is used by villagers for farming. The sangathan has also worked out a plan for getting ownership of this land for farming, with cap on the maximum amount for everyone. Those who used to own big chunk of land in that area gets maximum of 7 acre, hence ensuring proper distribution for everyone. But this also ends up hurting some of the ex-big farmers which also sometimes creates internal frictions. There have even been incidents of such disputes getting till court and still staying unresolved. Dubeji, karyakarta of Mandla district provided good inputs for a lot of questions that I asked. The hemlets that were formed of displaced people after dam had a lot of challenges for people who started living there. It took lot many years of struggle to get basic facilities such as health, schools, anganwadis, roads, water, electricity, ration shop etc. Some 10 crores were later allocated by the government for such development work. Even getting these hemlets recognized as revenue villages and getting individual and community rights for the houses and land were big tasks. A lot of villages are still not recognized as forest or revenue villages and things like NREGA hasn't begun there yet. Tatighat was one of the many villages that didn't have electricity for a long time. But due to struggle by people of tatighat they could get free solar panels for themselves. Today also they are able to run most of their electricity needs through these solar panels, even when they do have connection to the grid.

300 families from Chutka, a village in Mandla will be displaced for the 3rd time now. First time due to the dam reservoir, second time because of the wrong estimation of the submergence area and now for the third time when Madhya Pradesh will have its first nuclear plant on the banks of the reservoir. The promises are made to the villagers for electricity, but government can't answer that why even after having two hydel power plant units on the bargi dam, people get hardly 2 hours of electricity in the day (Many villages aren't even getting that much). The Chutka Parmanu Sangarsh Samiti that was formed has been struggling against the power plants since its conceptualization. People of the villages did not let the survey happen for the initial few times. The last time they found a few people secretly conducting survey for the reservoir land, they got suspicious and snatched their bags asking them to go to their seniors and get them to have a dialogue. The district collector too had gone to the people and

did a meeting with them, where in one of the female member simply told them that people are ready to give in writing that they have been doing okay without electricity and they don't want electricity for next 100 years. So please stop the plant now. One female said to me "Why don't they make the plant on the banks of big lake of Bhopal, that too has a lot of water. But they wouldn't want to spoil health of city dwellers, we villagers are the only guinea pigs." I did study some of the press reports of the nuclear plant. The nuclear power corporation document favoring nuclear power plants has an interesting line in it. About Chernobyl nuclear disaster, it does accept that the impact on health, human lives and environment was huge, but it also foolishly adds "Even this accident involving massive release of radiation did not result anywhere comparable to an atomic explosion." – so, according to NPCL, one should only object when the disaster is as huge as an atomic explosion! The colony of the employees who will work on the plant construction will be built quite far away from the plant, where as no consideration is being given to those who will stay nearby the plant site. It was interesting to observe the Tehsil and district officials coming out of the blue at the meeting of Chutka Parmanu Sangharsh Samiti that day. I also heard some of them wooing villagers about benefits of power plant and bitching about Rajkumarji outside the meeting. The new Tehsildar though seemed cooperative, when he was sitting in the meeting, busy taking notes.

Another thermal power plant that's already under construction is in Barela in Jabalpur District. We had a visit to the power plant site where the work was going on. The sangathan hasn't been able to stick its feet here as the village is not one of the displaced. A few of us went and talked to the villagers and got to know some details on the scenario. The Jhabua Power Limited Company, that is building the plant (2 units of 600MW each), had declared amount of 5 lac per acre as compensation for the private land. Since the area was mostly agriculture and not residential, there has not been any displacement. People did protest initially but later took the compensation. Now, due to lack of awareness and literacy, a lot of them were cheated on the compensation and were given only 50000 or 70000 per acre. A few of them who came to know about this, did stage the protest, which also went violent with lathi charge etc from the company goons. But in the end, some of them did get the viable compensation. The tea-stall owner near the plant site told us that the number of motor-bikes suddenly increased after that. Not many could buy the land from the compensation money as money in itself wasn't enough to buy same amount of land plus the land prices due to sudden demand had also increased multifold. Many of them today regret for selling the land as money is nearing its end and they do not still possess any land for future security. The power plant construction gives employment to total of 1000 people, out of which some of the unskilled labour is taken from Barela. But they haven't given employment to people from any other nearby villages. The operational employment is only 300 'skilled' people, so villagers now fear that they won't get anything after the plant is constructed. Moreover we saw that the distance between plants and the residential area of Barela was only one separating road. The tea-stall owner mentioned that the realization of the suffering they will have due to pollution next door, has only come now for the villagers. Some people standing there also told us about proposals that have come to Panchayat Samiti for the cement plant besides this power plant and this time it seems people don't want to part with their land after bitter experiences with JPL power plant. I got hold of EIA document of JPL plant from Rajkumarji and a lot of new facts came to my knowledge. It was shocking to know that some 86 trucks are employed to make rounds with ash from the power plants to the ash loading place and some 56 Ha

of area is only built for ash storage for 9 years. It's important to note here that the ash that's generated is more than 150 tonnes per hour (both fly and bottom ash combined). I was reminded of those ash mountains I saw from train on my way to Bilaspur. Coal requirement of this plant is approx 365 tonnes per hour and water requirement is 2362 cubic meter/hour, out of which they are planning to treat and re-use only 392 cubic meter/hour water.

Now the water for this plant, that's obviously going to come from Bargi reservoir, will be taken near village Baragadi in Seoni district. Normally the villagers living on the banks of the reservoir aren't permitted to lift the dam water by any means for agriculture. But permissions are loosened always for power plants and industries. Baragadi is one such village like Tatighat, where every evening people sit on the banks of massive reservoir and keep staring at their lost land in floods of water – water that they aren't supposed to use even after sacrificing their lands. Once displaced, a family goes 20 years back in their life, where they have to start from point zero again for all their needs, be it food, housing, education, water, electricity or health. They feel they have a right to the bargi water, for which they were made to give up these precious years of their lives. So, people of Baragadi do not want their water to go to the Barela power plant, and they are ready to fight for this. They had organized a meeting where I went along with Rajkumarji and other Karyakartas. Mammuji, adivasi of this village interestingly taunted that these days, for any kind of work, it's difficult to find any tehsil official in their offices, but now we know where to go if we want to meet them. They all have opened new office at the power plant site now! A lot of them had issues with pattas of their forest land, and most of them had been cheated by pattas for lesser amount of land than the one that was calculated using PDA. One female member of sangathan complained that even to give appeal for such issue, she needs to go to Seoni, and when she didn't have money for transportation, she asked her son to work at the power plant site, but they didn't provide him any work.

Conversations with journalists at Bhopal & Barwani updates

I had an unplanned meeting a few journalists. I basically went to meet Rakesh Dewan, a senior journalist, who used to write for Tehelka and other papers but accidentally I also met correspondents of The Hindu and The Statesman at his place. Apart from a lot of interesting discussion on history, religion, tribal issues of barwani and power plants I could also have some insights on their perspectives of MP's malnutrition issue. In an answer to the root cause of this, their general feeling was the fact that MP had majority of tribal dominated area. And with so-called mainstreaming of tribals, interferences of forest departments and promotion of wheat and rice in PDS, the traditional food practices is lost. The new foods promoted are not sufficient enough for the nutritional needs and hence the issue arises. Introduction of millets in PDS, if you see thus holds good stand here.

During the same time Madhuri had come to Bhopal with petition signatures from 7800 people for the bail of Valsing, who was still in custody since last one month. Over 7000 people had staged protest at six police stations asking for his bail and later a case with non-bailable charges was lodged on 6000 people (with names of 100 in there) along with Madhuri. Sendhwa court judge without seeing the details of the case, on the base of the charges itself refused bail to him. The appeal was give to high court and the hearing was up in a week's time. Madhuri had come to meet DGP in Bhopal with the bundle of 500

pages where people had neatly collected signatures/thumbprints of everyone along with their names within a couple of days' time. Each page was titled with 'arrest us' (Girafaar karo). I and Madhuri numbered each signature that took one full day and thus we arrived at the number 7810. Valsingbhai later got bail from Indore High Court.

Kisan Adivasi Sangathan – Kesla

I went to Kesla to meet Sunilji from Kisan Adivasi Sangathan. He and his wife Smita have been working there for last 25 years. Sunilji himself has been one of the displaced from dam on Chambal river. But since his father could hold good education he was able to get the job of lecturer/professor in Government College and since then they have been travelling with transfers. It was inspiring to see the amount of sacrifices people like him makes for the cause and principles one believes in. Though being graduated from a renowned institute like JNU, he has chosen to live in a mud hut, with even getting rid of the needs such as LPG cooking stove. The only difference in his lifestyle and that of normal villager was the mini library he got in his hut. Major part of his sangathan comprises of the people who were displaced from Tawa dam, national park and the space created for army firing. As Tawa dam was the first one to be built in Narmada valley, around 40 years back, this couple entered in lives of people much after that. Apart from his work with Sangathan, I also had other meaningful discussion about the history of various movements in India. He explained me the emergence and the need behind the political party – Samajvadi Jan Parishad – that he is affiliated with. Well, to an extent I too agree that if one needs to make the real change then the movement has to be strong and political, but it's also evident seeing BJP, how difficult it is to unite people, even that of the well-aware civil society itself, that fighting the deeply corrupted system holds a huge challenge. I also can't judge if replacing the existing system altogether is a better idea or repairing the existing one. A lot of such questions stay unanswered, and a few will always be, though I shall try to find as many answers as possible.

The inflow of various ideologies and thoughts were so high for me that I then decided to pause further travel for a few days and concentrate on some of the reading, writing and reflection and hence I went home (Ahmedabad) for the same. I did meet a few organization and travelled from there before taking off for Bangalore.

Meeting members of Anandi and Janpath

I went to meet Sejal Dand of Anand, who's one of the advisor to supreme court commissioners for the Right to food case to know about situation of Right to food in Gujarat. It was disheartening to find out that so-called better developed state of Gujarat, the government has even failed to provide the minimum food security that are ordered by the Supreme court of India until the Suo mottu filed by Anna Suraksha Abhiyan, based on Justice Wadhwa report on Gujarat RTF schemes, which yielded in the revision of the food entitlements early this year. Until then BPL families were getting grains of 15kg at APL prices! Now that the 35 kg grains to BPL and APL has been ordered by the high court, the government has given GRs, which when I read, couldn't stop laughing at the line that says, the government will now provide food for 'All', and inside the document it specifies that this 'All' means, the APL card holders whose income is less than 1 lac!

The much proclaimed micronutrient initiative by government as one of the first of its kind in the whole country (though it's already in practice in the other states such as Karnataka) is also a farce. In the name of micronutrient, packaged food, that's manufactured in Rajasthan is being distributed, instead of hot cooked fresh meal. And on the top of it, the government is trying to show it as something innovative that they've got for better nutrition of kids! From members of Anandi and people who came at Rourkella convention, I also observed that the situation of NREGA is also worse in Gujarat. Chandrika, from Anandi provided me a few GRs to study. On their request I also agreed to translate some of the document, a part of which may be used for the advisors report for the next commissioners' report.

Janpath

Janpath, originally registered as Society since 1989, basically provides platform for the network of 220 civil society organizations and movements in Gujarat. Pankti Jog, who also happens to be AID-Saathi, gave me a brief about its functioning and also provided me a good discussion on overall development scenario in Gujarat. Janpath, like any society also follows a constitution, where a member organization is registered after enough verification by its governing body (which consists of 1/5th of the member organizations that changes every year on rotation basis so that every member gets a chance to be in it). It also has an executive committee of 5 members that changes after 4 years along with its president. At present Nitaben Hadika of Anandi is President.

Janpath has also been an inception point for many initiatives such as Pravah (a network for drinking water problems), Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel, Vicharta Samuday Samarthan Manch, Salt workers union etc. After a few years, all these initiatives have been able to sustain on their own by the members who begun them. Janpath also runs an RTI Helpline. Other than that, it provides technical help and support to the groups on related issues that they work on by arranging regular trainings and connecting them to concerned expert in the respective area. It also supports those who are not registered by routing funds through it.

There are several things about such development model that I've got to know so far from various sources, including Janpath. People of Gujarat have always been good at business and hence the mentality of usual Gujaratis has been more or less capitalists and same is true for its government. Hence the problems of industries are prime. The land is being sold left right and center and the environment is horribly abused here. There also issue with so-called NGOs, as most of them are funded by government (Gujarat government has been putting out a lot of 'schemes' out to keep these NGOs busy enough on implementing them by government outsourced funds.) Moreover, almost every corporate has its own NGO, which keeps tab on such schemes and happenings in the surrounding village of its area. Incidents such as fishermen being killed by the security personal when mistakenly stepped into Reliance area on the coastal line are easily suppressed. The civil society too is quite divided and there are very few who raise their voices. Nowadays those who try that are taken into custody branding them as Naxalites. Recently 15 of such people were victims of this, against which I had also protested outside Gujarat Bhavan in Delhi. The system is loosely run by corporate themselves and incidents such as High Court judge being taken for the world tour are ordinary.

Mozda Parivar

I had heard a lot about Michel Mazgaonkar and Swati Desai from AIDers and was thinking of giving them a visit for long. Recently I got to know that Michel will be in US for 2 months, so I thought of visiting Mozda before that and hence decided to drop by for 3 days on my way back to Bangalore. Mozda is a village situated in Dediapada Taluk near Rajpipla. Michel and Swati, both having parents from old gandhian and JP movements, already had seeds of social change in them. After doing a motor cycle journey together to understand India, they had stayed in Rajpipla for 2 years and later shifted to Mozda. Since then it has been 20 years of their stay with this community, a collective that they proudly call 'Mozda Parivar'. The first thing I noticed after reaching was their house. House with Bamboo and mud/cowdung that looks similar to any other house in the surroundings has a lot of things worth noticing. They do have a lot of amenities of city-dwellers that they've collected for last 20 years, but living in the harmony with nature is the first thing that I would take in my learning. Michel, basically a mechanical engineer, has been into a lot of different types of innovations relating to appropriate energy. Their house does have a connection to grid, but most of their needs are managed with solar panels and wind-mill installed outside the house. The unique solar cooker that he has made generates heat at 400 degree and can cook food for 15 people easily in 1.5 hours when the sunlight is enough. It also has a setting of a clock, that rotates its big focusing mirror with the movement of sun after initial calibration. I also saw the much-talked about Pedal power generator that he made with two of his friends Ravi Kuchimanchi (one of the founding members of AID) and Roni. But due to its maintenance requirements and bulky design, it could not make its way through the community.

Their work throughout these years has been widespread but based on the demands from community that they cater to. They have been developing watersheds and have made a collective of women for tur dal. Other than that Michel with his innovations, also generates LED lights, recharges batteries of the people that they use to light up their houses, etc. They also have been giving workshops or trainings on RTI to people that is being used to some extent to resolve issues of corruption by people in their routine life. Recently they have started addressing ownership issues related to forest rights act also.

Personal Reflections

Workshop on Participatory Rural Appraisal(PRA) in Hannur

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) workshop was arranged at Holy Cross campus in Hannur district for CHLP Interns. The workshop was facilitated by Sam Joseph.

The first half of the day one of the workshop consisted of the discussions related to participation and what is the participatory approach. Sam started the discussion by asking the participants what their expectations were out of the workshop. Various points came out of the answers from all the participants were

- To understand 'participation'
- What are the yardsticks to 'appraisal'
- To understand Panchayati Raj
- To understand what is PRA, its tools and benefits
- Skill building in participation
- Beneficiaries, victims, actors and owners
- Scope and challenges and limitations
- Why PRA
- Applications of PRA, its tools and the issues with it

To address some of the expectations, he began by asking what is community. Each participant presented their perceptions and understandings of the community. The objective though was not to define community, but to understand what it means for different people. To explain that more in detail, he took out a paper with 'E' on it and asked everyone sitting in the circle to tell him what do they see. Depending on the position, people saw it as E, W, M etc. Meaning that every individual has different perspective of a given situation. And the same is also the case with any community. Hence there's where the challenge lies in participatory approach, as to how to bring together people who are coming with different understanding.

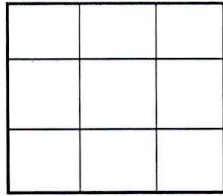
Another example to elaborate the same thing was given of a village who has received, say, 1 lac funding and the discussion is how to utilize it. The people who are involved are some Rich members, poor in the village, NGOs and govt. Officials. But when the discussion happens, it's highly possible that no-one will ask poor how the money should be spent even if the money has been give for their welfare. Every one sees it in a different way. Hence it's very important to take opinions of the beneficiaries. Same way if one wants to work with Panchayati Raj, it's best to work with Gram Sabhas which becomes more participatory approach.

PRA as such means 'Participatory Rural Appraisal', but it can also mean 'Poke and Run Away' in many cases. It came as a systems based thinking approach in 1980s during farming systems research, which was earlier called as Rapid Rural Appraisal. There have been attempts to involve community in long run so the term PRA is not much suitable, and it will make more sense to call it as Participatory Learning & Action (PLA).

In response to the question about degrees of participation, it was discussed that more than degrees, willingness to listen to people without imposing own agenda and becoming a 'stakeholder' in the process is more important. Now the work 'stakeholder' can only be used if one is committing something important which may go in vein if the results are not in favour. Hence one should always ask honestly, 'am i a stakeholder in this?'. The answer tells the degree of one's participation.

Democracy has two deceases. Tyranny of the vote and democratic despotism. The voting which is called as mode to establish democracy, is not real democracy or participation. It's important to figure out who's sovereign, people or the government? It always have to be people.

Later a few excercizes where carried out of identifying what the participants saw in different chart diagrams presented by Sam. One of them was as below:

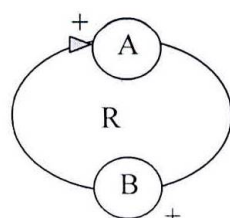
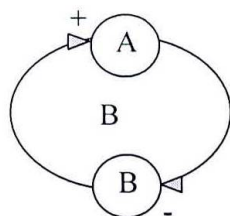


People were asked how many squares are there. The answers were 1, 9, 14 and 4. This and other two related charts showed that everyone saw what they wanted to see depending on their earlier biases. When asked about the biases that people might carry when they visit the villages in the afternoon, many honestly accepted that they do think that people will be underdeveloped, unaware of the realities. Some happened to have the cultural biases where as a few said they believe that systems by default are faulty in rural areas. Many accepted that they can't really say that they understand how poor family survives without food, but they do want to teach them about nutrition. They don't really know how to plough but want to tell farmers about better farming methods. The moral is that any idea of developement should begin with the person suffering from problem. People's movements have to emerge out of people and not NGOs.

Choices, are the basis of atonomy, that gives participation. It's up to an individual to find out how to excercise these choices. The media can be anything ranging from telling, selling, co-opting, consulting. But if the atonomy is to be created, one should have capability to co-create. Atonomy thus gives commitment where as program gives merely compliance. To empower anyone, one has to disempower herself. There's a difference between citizin, subject and slave. Instead of being soverign citizens, people are more like subjects and people in the villages are slaves.

Developement can be done in 3 ways: Relief & welfare, Self reliant community and systems change. Systems thinking can be done with the aid of tools like Causal loop diagram (CLD), which is more like thinking in circles.

Causal Loop Diagram – All government or NGO reports are linear i.e., line by line. Systems work in a circular ways. Any problem in development is a self re-enforcing loop. Unless this link is broken, the loop ultimately leads to destitution. The balance loop tend to be stable for long periods of time & continually re-enforcing.



R – Reinforcing loop
B – Balancing loop

Positive connectors : If A increases, B increases. If A decreases, B decreases.
Negative connectors: If A increases, B decreases and vis-a-vie

A loop is balancing if odd number of the connecting line is negative.

For ex. in case of Poverty, its a reinforcing loop of assets and indebtedness, which ends in the destitution.

Opportunities and Services Map: A map showing the pictorial depiction of all the services in the location for the community. In cases of the villages under consideration, such things can be all the health services including PHC, CHC, subcenters, traditional healers; anganwadis, PDS shops, schools etc.

Social Map:

Social map is again a pictorial depiction of the entire village, which includes services, facilities, houses as well as resources. The map can be a tool to further the conversation with the community. The participants were involved in an exercise of making a social map of holy cross on the floor first, hence they could understand the process they should be following with full participation of the community, making them develop such map of their own village.

All the participants were divided into four groups and allocated four different villages where they were supposed to get community participation in order to come up with social map as well as opportunities and services map.

The participants in each group were :

Group 1

Premdas, Lavanya, Mallikarjun, Prahlad, Anand

Group went to BM Halli village in Chamrajnagar Taluk and Kollegal district. About 15-20 people from the village had come to meet them. After having some casual talk with the community, they went for a walk in village to observe things, post which they started drawing their maps with the help of community. The Opportunities and Services map showed that the village had access to medical supply. 3 village health workers from the village had been trained by the holy cross. Otherwise the village doesn't have any PHC or subcenter. The nearest subcenter is in Yellemallai. The PHC is in Hannur where as CHC is in Kollegal. They also access multispeciality hospital of holy cross in Kamgere. The PDS shop was also indicated in the map. The villagers informed that it opens for only 3 days in a week.

Group 2

Rohini, Sejal, Sharath, Suresh, Karibassappa, Muttu(holy cross)

Group 2 visited KVN doddhi village, where in they gathered at the Village Health Worker Jayamma's house.

The participants explained villagers the purpose of their visit and explained about both the maps. The opportunities and services map was facilitated by the participants, where in the villagers informed them about health services. It came out that there is no subcenter, PHC, or PDS shop in the village. There are 4-5 village dais who are experienced in conducting deliveries. There's also no school in the village. It was a great time in doing social mapping as it was a new experience. Villagers also include borewell and water tanks as water sources in the map.

Group 3

Chikmallapura village

Hanumattapa, Madhapan, Manjula, Sriram and sister from Holy cross

This group met with an SHG in working at the handloom. The meetings were conducted with the same SHG women. The women helped with the map of opportunities and services after the members explained them what it is about. Apart from other services these women also indicated transport and schooling facilities in the map.

Group 4

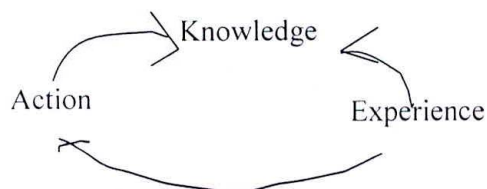
Edallidoddi village

Shobha, Ganesh, James, Joyce

The group started with the discussions amongst the gathered community people by asking them some particular questions. A lot of time was utilized in this, hence it left too little time for the mapping tasks. However with the help of villagers they did try to map opportunities and services. They took help from gathered community people in preparing the maps where in they indicated dairy, lake and even the area for open defecation in addition to other services and landmarks. The unique thing about the village was that all the people were christian, so they did not notice any issues related to castism.

Day 2

The second day begun with discussions related to previous day's experience where in the participants were asked to put knowledge, experience and action in the order of their occurrences in the cycle. After a lot of discussions there after yielded the fact that any experience is a result of knowledge that feeds into action and the cycle thus goes on as showed in the figure.



Lead time for the information : The time for which information can still be utilized.

Lag time for the information: Amount of time in which the action for the information should be taken before the action becomes useless.

Discussions:

After surveying the group activity from the previous day, Sam pointed out the difficulty in bringing about real participation. The first element in participation is understanding self i.e., respect abilities of people to survive. As long as as NGO's & development workers have a set agenda, community participation shall never happen.

The major points came out of the follow up discussion were:

If one's motive is to provide relief and rescue then it has to be plainly that. One should not then expect community to lead or participate in own agenda.

The change should begin with community, not with the development workers.

The participation is a belief system not a tool or a methodology.

Systems thinking approach:

A system can be defined as interconnections of process, input, boundaries, parts, hierarchy or outputs.

For e.g. The boundaries of a tree are limited as a tree has limited ability to pursue it's objectives. Where as a human being has ore capabilities to take objectives forward.

Vensim PLE : A software tool for systems simulation

Usage characteristics of an object:

This was explained by asking 3 people to write 'participation' on a paper, holding same pen together. It was obviously difficult to write it as everyone tried to push the pen accouring to their own handwriting style. Hence, for a pen, joint usage characteristic is very low.

Joint Usage		
Exclusion	Low or alternate	High
Easy	Private goods, house, car, bike etc	Toll/club/group goods, cinema hall, swimming pool, amusement park, cable TV etc
Difficult	Common pool resources, ground water by borewell, fish hunting	Public goods, air, roads etc

The above table was the outcome of the discussions amongst the participants.

The participants were questions that which block do they find themselves fitting in from below table.

	Relief	Self reliant community	Systems change
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Private good	1	2	3
Toll good	4	5	6
Common pool resource	7	8	9
Public good	10	11	12

Another exercicize:

The participants were asked to write the name of the dicease and draw the appropriate picture for the same on a paper chit. After collecting those, one of the dicease chit was kept constant, and a comparision was made with the other disease, asking questions such as which disease do they think is more harmful, why so, etc. Thus, the various dicease characteristics were gathered (without any names of diceases). Below table was made after this:

Disease characteristic/disease	Diabetes	Chicken gunia	Chicken pox	Dengue
Sigma	1	4	6	8
Causes death				
Preventable				
Not curable				

Participants were asked to rate each disease based on it's characteristic. The basic motive of the whole exercicize is not to rank the disease in anything with total but to understand what community thinking is for any dicease. All the 4 groups went to their respective villages then to carry out the same exercicize.

Group learning:

For group 2, a lot of community people were not available, so they later joined group 1 in their village.

Group 1 & 2

The members of these groups facilitated the community to frame the table with their perspectives for each dicease. Where as Anand, a member of group1, tried a different approach with kids, in which he begun with asking kids if someone had any dicease in their family. Kids responded with names, and anand then asked where do they go then? So on, with questions and answers, kids ended up drawing hospital on the floor with chalk. Anand then carried out similar activity with those kids. The women during this pariticipation did ask questions as to what will they gain from this, to which there wasn't any satisfactory answer with anybody.

In the end of the discussion, one of the community women even came up with her own home-made remedies for each dicease that she has been trying with people in the village and have been proven effecive!

Group 3

This group members earlier took cancer as a constant dicease for making the comparision. In which the villagers expressed the concern that no matter what, they feel cancer is the worst dicease and there's no comparision. The participants then changed their constant and carried out the rest of the

exercize.

Group 4

Not much info!

Day 3 (back in bangalore)

Day 3 started as reflection on the last two days.

Q: What are the requirements for participation that we can derive from the last 2 days?

Ans: Communication, speaking other's language, requirement to unlearn, motivation for participation has to start from outsiders

Consider yourself as an outsider always, because, one can never understand what difficulties communities face unless (s)he lives there.

One of the group members regretted the fact that 1-2 women in the villages they visited, gave up their day's wages to facilitate their study, which gave all a lesson that the participation can not begin with sacrifices on the side of community. If one wants participation, one has to be a stakeholder, that means, one has to put in something valuable enough.

Some of the village folks had also walked long distances to meet the groups, waited for more than an hour for them. Hence, one should always value time and efforts of the community more than anything. A thought has to be given to what people will gain out of your meetings and the self interest, research or donor driven tasks has to take a backseat where community interests are at stake.

The full discussion can be summarized in three points:

- Vex Not, Aex Not (Vex -visual extractive exercize, Aex – audio extractive exercize) – Do not use people for extracting something that is going to serve only your purpose.
- It's 'their' cycle of experience, not ours
- Take time from the community that suits their needs.

Systems thinking by loop diagrams

Sam showed example of a complex loop diagram of child trafficking on the vensim simulator to discuss about the interconnectedness of various issues. It showed clearly that one has to take into consideration a lot many factors associated with any issue that's being looked at.

The Raichur visit, rightly placed during the 3rd week of orientation could give me practical overview of what we talked and discussed at length in first 2 weeks at CHC. All the interactions with sangha women on subjects ranging from castism, violence against women, NREGA, Community based monitoring of NRHM, restores my faith on the power of community and unity. Here I will try to summarize learnings that I gained from the entire visit.

Untill 1948, Raichur, along with other 4 districts were under Nizam of Hyderabad, due to which this zone is often referred to as Hyderabad-Karnataka. The district has Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers passing through north and south of it respectively. Cotton, Paddy, Sunflower and Jowar are the main crops being grown here.

A lot of castism issues prevail in the district even today. 'Lingayata' and 'Gowda' are the major dominant upper caste. 'Nayak' which are not originaly tribals, somehow have got themselves classified under ST, hence they act as a dominant part in ST. 'Chaluwadi' (funeral services) and 'Madiga' (skinning dead animals) consist the majority of the untouchable SC population. Raichur has grossly unequal land distribution. Many gowdas own big chunk of land. An MLA, even today owns 4000 acres of land.

Jagrutha Mahihila Sangathana (JMS)

JMS was started in the month of October 1999 and is managed by Navnirman Trust of which Dr. Bhagya is the President and Premdas, Neju, Ratnamma are some of the trusties. The basic objective of the group was to represent the voice of the voiceless, that is women from the SC/ST caste.

3 divisions – Potnal, Balganur, Bagalwada
2 sanchalaki and 1 karyakarta (co-ordinator) in each division

Today, it consists of 40 Sanghas, operating at different villages. These sanghas women work on various issues like NREGA, NRHM, PDS, livelihood generation, fighting for other oppressed women etc. One of the noteworthy struggle by the women was for the loss of jobs due to machine harvesting during the draught years. Protest against that was successful & jobs were given back to peasants. They did dharna in front of the DC office. This prevented migration and also the wages were increased. There was also an incident where in girl that goes house to house to collect hairs and give a hair pin in return, was raped by 3 men of the upper caste and for which sangha women fought. The rapists were jailed but later were freed on bail. Around 600 women had been a part of the protest for this. In 2004, a women in Venenuru was paraded naked where JMS women tried to protest. The women have even protested for upper caste women who were burnt alive.

Chilipili school:

The school was started with the intentions of admitting ex-child labourers back to mainstream education. In early years, school was run as a temporary school with different communities on yearly basis. For last 2 years, it has been started as a residential school under NCLP (National Child Labour Program) inside the JMS hut. Apart from Rs. 11/- for meals (which consist of 3 meals in a day!), kids also get Rs. 100/- per month stipend and books under NCLP. The stipend is deposited in the bank account which opened in the name of each child. Most of the kids before coming to chilipili were working as labour in fields. A few of them were pledged as bonded labour by their parents for the loans taken from landlords. The teachers are trained in teaching with innovative methods of learning. One of the teacher is also ex-chilipili student who studied till PUC after being admitted back to school by chilipili. A few of the ex-students have applied for Anganwadi workers

with the help of JMS karyakarta. So far the school is caterred to approximately 350 kids. The school is at present managed by Subhash, who also happens to be the principle for chilipili school.

The kids, as I saw at Chilipili are taught to be self-reliant. Activities such as washing one's own cloths, cleaning of rooms where they sleep, plastering the compund with cow-dung are performed by kids. One of the evenings we talked to many of the kids, and also asked their background. Majority of them were working as agricultural labourers or grazing cattles of the land lords. One boy in his childhood was sold to the landlord as bonded labour on non-payment of the loan.

Herbal Medicine Unit

Harbal medicine unit of JMS was started by Mita, who after her travel through Raichur villages, went to Hyderabad for one month of training in Harbal medicine. She then gathered 80 women from 40 villages to disseminate her learnings in the form of training. There was a lack of interest from many women initially but when they found the worth of the knowledge many came forward to learn more. Two women were then sent to Mysore for further training of 8 days, who ended up training 8 more women (2 women from 4 villages) after cominhg back. With such trainings, the unit has now 16 trained women, who on every thursday, which happens to be the market day for Potnal, these women open Herbal clinic for the other villagers. JMS Hut gives them space to grow herbs. In the initial period, many women lacked confidence to approach people with their skills. To overcome this, for 2 years, they started using the herbal remedies in their own house first, where they observed quite an improvement in their family health which gave them enough courage to approach the other villagers. Chinamma, who happens to be very good healer, explained us various herbal medicines and their benefits. It was impressive to hear them narrating their stories of cases where they could successfully heal numurous cases of headache, migrain, paralisys and white skin patches.

Terracotta Income generation group

Nearly 80-100 women from different sanghas were trained for terracotta jewellery products during drought years (2001-3) by Koshi, who did his diploma in Pottery. The training was started to generate means of livelihoods when mass migration took place due to severe drought. Half the women dropped out in the end due to difficult nature of the work. It took around one full year to stabilize the group which finally consisted 12-14 women who were determined to go on. During farming season, these women work as agricultur labourers and for the rest of the days they create the jewelleryes. They produce depending on orders and go for exhibitions to several places (such as Dastakar exhibitions). The wage standard followed is of the NREGA where in each women draws Rs. 110/- per day as per the number of days she works. Gangamma, who knows reading and writing, manages accounts. The women during our interactions, shared how they have gained more confidence after working independently for years now, and even with the challenge of aging vision, they are determined to go on.

Community based Monitoring Programmes under NRHM

Ratnamma briefed the group on work of JMS on CMP, where in it has taken charge of community based monitoring programme for 50 villages of Manvi Taluk (out of 110 of total villages) with more focus on Women's health. The villages are cattered by 4 PHCs (Potnal, Hirekotnakal, Bagwata, Torandilli). 10 members of JMS, after getting trained under 12 day workshop of ToT (Training of Trainers) by CHC and Karuna Trust, started interacting with villagers in groups of 2 in different villages. The 3 day process followed in a village consisted of Introduction to VHSC & it's funcations; general meetings with Gram Sabha; mapping of village resources (school, water, road etc) and a plan of action based on that mapping. There were several problems while conducting the

public dialogues; some of the doctors totally refused to accept their mistakes while pointing of denial cases; many government officials did not care to be present in the hearings. The karyakartas also maintain files for each village that shows status progress with colour coding. Some of the positive improvements that Ratnamma saw after CMP include, increasing accountability of the medical staff; deployment of more ANM in some villages; improved infrastructure; inclusion of AYUSH staff and regular ANM visits.

Interactions with Sangha women at Amreshwara camp

Despite the fact that it was late evening when we visited, all the sangha women took time out of their routine schedule gathered at one place for a meeting with us. Their sangha consists of 15 women who have been saving Rs. 20/- per week since last 2 years. The money is deposited in a farmer's co-operative bank and the account is managed by 2 representative. From the money accumulated in the bank, they provide low interest loans and hence, it helps them avoid loans from money-lender or from banks. "Earlier we used to hide our face with 'pallu' before forming sangas, but now we simply tie it across our waist and walk anywhere." a profound fact, most effectively put by one of the sangha women, upon asking about the changes that formation of sangha brought into their lives. The women, besides being empowered have also learned how to read-write and have become more aware of the various government schemes, their rights and entitlements. It has also helped them to become more united and courageous, as a result, they also visit places across country to make their voice heard in different protests and struggles.

Visits to various villages:

Muddanguddi

We started the visit to this village with its primary school, which has been running since 1950s and teaches kids till 8th class. It has 7 teachers including one headmaster. We could not meet the headmaster as he was away for some work, but we could interact with 3 of the female teachers. All of them were quite young and were coming from different districts. They expressed their difficulties with staying alone in the village due to no provision of any accommodation by the government. The school caters to 171 students (99 boys and 72 girls). We could see a water tank, which was getting supply from Potnal main water tank by pump. According to the teachers, the kids were undergoing regular health checkup once a year and were given required medications in case of any health problems. One of the teacher also talked of the special taluk level trainings for handling disabilities, which she mentioned, was helping them handle one case of a physically handicapped child in this school. The toilets in the school, with no water supply looked almost unused, though teacher assured us that kids use the toilets. Mid-day meal is cooked twice inside the school itself. Vimukti, a local non-profit group supports the school with an assistant teacher, who takes classes for stitching, tailoring and computer. As per the latest SSA guidelines, school has adopted Nalli Kali method of teaching, which is an Activity based learning methodology for kids of class 1st and 2nd. The teacher who showed us the Nalli Kali room, expressed that it's much more interesting to teach using this method both for the teacher and the kids. There is no electricity provision in the school and it also has room shortages. Though with a few such short-comings the overall status of the school looked average.

Due to more number of kids the village has two Anganwadis. The first one we visited was the newly added one and lacked all types of basic infrastructural necessities. The room was very much congested to accommodate even 20 kids. The AWW, who was very keen on showing us all the records that she had been maintaining including the methods she had been using to teach kids some basic colour-identifications. She seemed quite experienced and after some more interactions, we

found that she was just transferred to this Anganwadi 3 months back and had been working as AWW for last 17 years.

The other anganwadi, which has been running for long time was relatively much more spacious. The AWW of that Anganwadi too, as we stepped inside, begun showing us all the records of the Anganwadi. After some casual checking of the records and talk about her knowledge on ICDS, we went on checking the (packaged) supplements.

jagir Pannur

jagir Pannur is one of the village that was badly affected by flood. We stopped by this village to meet women of Preeti Sanga, that was started 10 years back. They have been protesting against non-payment of unemployment allowances. So far they haven't received any success with their struggle but the women were determined to go on until they get their entitlements. On our way to sanga, we observed ongoing construction of houses as a part of flood relief by the local church (and also found out that the houses were supposed to be given only to the christian families).

Hirekotnakal

Looking at the PHC building from outside, the first thing we noticed was the big range of solar water heater. Later when we talked to the staff nurse, we figured it was purchased from untied fund of PHC. It has 4 sub-centers under it and has total capacity of 6 beds, all of which were unoccupied at that time. According to the nurse they get 50-60 outpatients per day and 5-6 in-patients. It handles 12-13 deliveries per month. They have 3 staff nurse, 1 pharmacist and a lab-technician (who comes for 3 days a week). Except one staff nurse that we talked to, all the other staff was out on Ugadi leaves. The doctor was away for some training at the district hospital. Overall infrastructure of the Phc looked quite good, seeing that it even had RO water purifier and TV set, besides all the basic necessities. But the medical waste management still stays a problem with no proper incineration facilities. While we were interacting with the staff nurse, two of the sanga women kept taunting the nurse with their complains, one of which was no injections given by nurse/doctor. Not giving injections (regardless of the need) is as poor treatment by the villagers and we found nurse taking the complains of the women (in front of us) quite emotionally. She openly shared her as a village nurse with us. It was obviously clear that she was finding her job quite difficult, seeing that she had to stay far away from her house (which was in a better off district setup) and no residential quarters were provided to her by the district management. Somewhere I felt there is a need for the sanga women to understand the issues of the nurses and doctors and that way villagers together with medical staff can make work for the betterment of the health care services.

Interactions with NJMO women

On the last day of our stay at potnal, a few women from NJMO visited us and all of us had a good discussion about the splendid work that the Okhuta women have been doing for last 6 years. Navjeevana Mahila Okhuta was started by Abhay Kumar with the initial focus of Devdasi rehabilitation and gradually expanded their intervention into other women's issues. Mokshamma, Dhyamma and Yelamma from NJMO first started with explaining about the devdasi tradition.. (Some bits of this interaction and other learnings about this are captured [here](#). In the initial years they tried to organized women in 4 taluks in Raichur district. Some of the major issues addressed by Okhutta are of wages/employment, housing, toilets and education for kids of devdasis. With other partner organizations like Seva and NABARD, they facilitates the vocational trainings of such kids. Some of the orphan kids or the girls that are to become devdasis in near future are sent to Visthar in bangalore, that runs residential school for children at risk. One of the surveys carried out by NJMO, showed more than 300 devdasis living home-less in Raichur, which was sent to the Rajit

Gandhi housing board in Bangalore. After hefty follow up they could get 280 houses sanctioned, building which again required tremendous amount of follow up with individual gram panchayats and local authorities. The entire process took more than 2 years to finish, that successfully ended up providing housing facilities to the devdasis. NJMO also works for livelihood generation for women, via formal or informal employment, by forming collectives and SHGs. They had also struggled for the pension scheme with WCD department. The earlier scheme support was stopped by the department which was reinvoked by continuous and effective lobbying by NJMO members. The struggle by the NJMO members now ensures 50% subsidy on bank loans, 400/- pension per month and ration card to devdasis.

NJMO also intervened in the NREGA related issues for all the oppressed women, including devdasis. Apart from awareness generation about the NREGA, they also helped women to get their job cards, unemployment allowances (when applicable) etc. One remarkable success was the 15 days dharna opposite to the DC office which could get women their pending unemployment allowances.

75 SHGs of Lingasur Taluk, under guidance of NJMO, formed a co-operative society which now has 1050 members. It's called as Swabhimana Janapara Vividha Uddesha Sahakara Sangha. It works as a bank that gives 0.5% interest per month for deposits and charges 2% interest for loans. Membership fee is Rs. 125/- and share value is Rs. 100/-. Bank admin costs are supported by NJMO and the salary of the employees (who manage the admin related work) is supported by Everychild. So far the members have put together 9 lac Rupees.