

ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT, REVIEW OF A SEVERAL MONTHS STRUGGLE



On August 28th, after twelve days of hungry strike, Anna Hazare broke his fast. After a long wrestling match with the government, the anti-corruption activist obtained concessions from Parliament: the anti-corruption bill that was being examined would be replaced by a stronger one (the "Jan Lokpal Bill"). For several months, corruption has been in headlines, first through numerous scandals that shook the government, and, since April, through actions initiated by the movement against corruption led by Anna Hazare, which received widespread support in civil society.

On April 4th, Anna Hazare announced an unlimited fast to obtain from the government the passing of an efficient law against corruption, the "Jan Lokpal Bill", by a committee composed of representatives of government and of civil society. Support demonstrations that took place all over the country showed the anger of society at the corruption that affects millions of people at every level. Hazare ended his hunger strike on August 9th, when the government accepted the movement's demands. There was a history to this achievement. During the proceeding months, a committee had been set up to draft the bill, but the government's representatives had rejected numerous propositions coming from the representatives of civil society, which led to a weak and inefficient law according to them. In reply to this, a new non-violent demonstration took place in Delhi on August 16th. This time, the government chose to prevent the protest by regulating the actions of the demonstrators (the gathering could not exceed 5000 people, and the fast could not last more than 3 days). At the leaders' refusal to take the pledge of following these rules, the government chose repression and detained them in prison. Released in the evening, Hazare refused to leave the jail until a written permit to demonstrate without any condition was given, and started a new hunger strike. On August 17th, the movement

got a permit to carry out its action on Ramlila Maidan, a place at the centre of Delhi. After 12 days of fasting and support demonstrations all over the country, the government accepted the movement's request : the reinforcement of the law against corruption. Despite this victory, it remains to be seen whether the government will really act to implement a strong law, and, if it does, whether this law would be really efficient. But what is an unquestionable victory is the fact that a large part of the population has stood up against corruption. These thousands of people who were willing to raise their voices represent, more than the law itself, the greatest hope to free India from corruption.



WHAT IS THE JAN LOKPAL BILL ?

The Jan Lokpal Bill is a law against corruption proposed by the movement led by Anna Hazare. This aims to be a more radical and efficient law than the one proposed by the government (the law called "Lokpal Bill" that was examined by in Parliament this summer). The main points of the Jan Lokpal Bill are :

- ▶ The creation of an ombudsman body ("Lokpal"), at the federal level and in each state.
- ▶ The ombudsman would be in charge of registering and investigating complaints of corruption coming from citizens (in the government law "Lokpal Bill", citizens can't complaint directly).
- ▶ The ombudsman could investigate every bureaucrat and magistrate (In the Lokpal Bill, the ombudsman can't investigate the prime minister or judges).
- ▶ The Ombudsman would have the power to initiate prosecution (he just has an advisory role in the Lokpal Bill).
- ▶ The Jan Lokpal Bill would provide protection to the whistleblower (contrary to the Lokpal Bill).

CORRUPTION IN INDIA

Over these past years, several big politico-financial scandals broke out. Scandals around the preparation of the Commonwealth Games in 2010, the sale of telecommunication licenses (the 2G spectrum scam) etc., have probably triggered off anger among the population, bringing light to the facts of corruption involving members of government. But this anger is also fueled by the fact that corruption is affecting many citizens in their everyday life. According to the NGO Transparency International, 54% of households have to pay a bribe in a 12 month period to receive basic services. On the website www.ipaidabribe.com, launched in October 2012, citizens are invited to tell how and why they have been asked to pay a bribe. Reports show the extent of corruption : to obtain an administrative file, a place in a good school, a connection to water supply system, a driving license... Corruption can also be an impediment to access to land : to get a title deed or the demarcation of your land, you may have to pay.

CULTURAL TRAINING IN KATNI

To create awareness about the rights of people in poor communities and to mobilize them to struggle in a non-violent way, culture is a key tool. The people with whom Ekta Parishad is working are largely illiterate, so they often perceive lectures as a boring method of learning. However, culture is a significant method for them, they understand and enjoy it. Through songs, dance or theatre, the message is passed on more easily than with long speeches. From August 17th to 19th, 30 people from Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand took part in a cultural training in MJVS center (Katni, MP), in the presence of several leaders

of Ekta Kala Manch (the cultural wing) and of Ekta Mahila Manch (the women's wing). The objective was to strengthen the cultural team and to prepare some cultural material: during the training, 26 songs were recorded, and cultural teams were set up for the March Jan Satyagraha 2012. But the aim was also to give more space to women in the cultural wing: out of 30 participants, 24 were women. The training was also an occasion to discuss the status of women in Indian society, and, through artistic learning, to increase their role and power in Ekta Parishad and in the communities they are working with.

« Well being of the last for the well being of all »

FOR AN EFFICIENT LAW AGAINST CORRUPTION, CIVIL SOCIETY IS RALLYING AGAIN



NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON VIOLENCE IN TRIBAL REGIONS

Many rural areas in India are rich in terms of natural resources, attracting public and private actors with economic interests. The same regions are the regions with the most tribal communities. This creates conflicts of which the poorest are the most victimized. The situation worsens as the Government doesn't give these issues priority while an increasing number of local self-supporters is deprived of their livelihood and suffers violence.

The National Consultation in Ranchi was organized to discuss these problems and possible non-violent response strategies. The experiences shared by the participants showed that the tribal regions get harassed from several sides: the corporate and the governmental sectors implement projects without consulting locals, often jeopardizing their livelihood resources. The resulting upsurge of violent groups such as Naxalite also threatens the local communities. The state is present in these areas through police men that do not contribute to an improvement of the situation. Moreover, Government is said to show a growing intolerance towards people and groups that are trying to find constructive solutions. It is cutting democratic space for discussion and consultation, for example by consciously avoiding the use of the tribal languages. The freedom of expression is not guaranteed and social workers are sometimes actively targeted. The prevalent corruption is worsening the problem of resource alienation and is making it more difficult to induce change. The corporate sector takes over natural resources to increase their profit at the cost of the local communities: Tribal, farmers and forest dwellers are deprived of their livelihood resources and are left with polluted natural resources. The Government often facilitates this process by deciding on land use changes. Many of such projects happen in the name of economic growth and structural development but do not improve



the situation for the poorest. According to the law 22, 26% of the profit from mining should be shared with tribal, but it is often not shared, and farmers get very little compensation for their land. Many of the projects are illegal and related to corruption: it was estimated that about 80% of the mining activity in India is illegal and often supported by the state. The police, armed groups and private armies of landowners are a threat to the local communities. However, a participant argues that in the regions where Naxalites are present, the natural resources still are in the hands of tribal, whereas they are taken away by third parties where the armed group is not there. All participants agree that violence can't be the way to fight for the resources of the poor, but opinions differ on how to respond to these violent groups. Because of past incidents, several participants doubt that the Government can be trusted as a conflict mediator. Even generally, the state doesn't invest in conflict resolution and peace building but opts for repressive violence.

The proposed remedies for many of these problems include the use of democratic space, the valuation and use of tribal knowledge, the promotion of dialogue and non-violent strategies. Existing Acts that help to increase the local self governance, democracy, and tribal leadership, like the PESA Act, have to be implemented. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that tribal are rich of resources and knowledge; that it is the Government and other actors that make local communities believe the opposite in order to take advantage of the natural wealth. A great success of the National Consultation is to have brought together people with different ideologies. Moreover the conference has generated an action plan foreseeing the creation of three communication groups that engage the discussion with the Government, the corporate sector, and the civil society. It has also made a catalogue of recommendations for the promotion of a non-violent environment in tribal regions. Even if the finalization of the declaration was said to have been challenging, it is a success to have created a base on which several non-violent strategies can be built on.

CONSULTATION ON LAND RIGHTS IN HIMALAYA

With its protecting mountains, the perennial rivers, and its sense for peace and spirituality, Himalaya is said to be the lifeline of India. But over the past years, different projects in the name of development have been bringing up social and environmental conflicts, jeopardizing the region's sustainability. To discuss the reasons for the emergence of Himachal Pradesh as a conflict area, as well as possible remedial measures, social workers from about 50 organizations have come together in Shimla on August 29th, for a Consultation on Land Rights and Advocacy. The event lasted two days and was hosted by the Himalaya Nithi Campaign, a forum of social organizations engaged in protests against large projects. During the first day, knowledge and experiences regarding the ongoing conflicts were shared. Among the sources the region's social and environmental problems, the construction of cement

factories, ski resorts with artificial snow, and hydroelectric projects on rivers were named. Their negative effects on ecosystems in general and the livelihood resources of farmers specifically, have triggered a strong opposition by social workers. Success stories of struggles against these projects presented by social activists underlined the important role of local actors in opposing corporate or governmental projects which endanger the region's natural resources. On this basis, participants formulated arguments to influence policy makers to pursue a more sustainable development of the region. On the second day, the local struggles were linked with the larger action of social workers in India fighting for the natural resources and livelihood for the marginalized. The future agenda was set, including activities in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, and Punjab in the coming months.



VIOLENCE
IN TRIBAL AREAS,
PROBLEMS
AND REMEDIES

NEXT EVENTS

INTERNATIONAL
MOBILIZATION
CONFERENCE ON
THE RIGHT TO LAND
AND LIVELIHOOD
12-13 SEPT.
GENEVA
(SWITZERLAND)

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PREPARATORY
MEETING
WITH VOLUNTARY
ORGANIZATIONS
ON JS 2012
2-3 SEPT. BANGALORE
25-26 SEPT. DELHI