

Annexure 9. Media Consultation

Report on the Consultation on the Status of Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Tasks of Land Reforms, July 27, Constitution Club, New Delhi.

Over the years, Ekta Parishad has been trying to bring policy changes for inclusive growth in land and agrarian sectors, which are the basic livelihood of a large majority of our population. The Committee formed as a result of Janadesh 2007 and the continued effort on submitting a 300 page report on land reforms to the Planning Commission are the results of advocacy works carried out by Ekta Parishad at State and Central levels. As part of the programs, on 27 July 2010 a “Consultation on National Land Reforms Policy” was held at the Constitution Club, Raisina Road, New Delhi. The meeting was called to discuss the response of the Planning Commission to the recommendations of the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task of Land Reforms and to present Ekta Parishad’s padyatra plan for October 2012 Jan Satyagraha. The meeting was attended by PV Rajgopal, President Ekta Parishad, Prof S B Saxena, Shri Govindacharya, Amitabh Behar, Swami Agnivesh, Prof Parveen Jha of JNU, Sejo Singh, National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Sandeep Chachre of Action Aid India and other commit members and media personal.

At the meeting it was felt that the Planning Commissions remarks by and large endorsed the Committee report. Only the endorsement was on things that were peripheral to the issue. Thus substantive issues such as reduction in land ceiling were not entertained and procedural matters such as establishment of fast track courts, was agreed to. Prof SB Saxena, felt that the Committee members should wait for response from the States. So, far only two states have responded, namely, Goa and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

It was felt that large scale land grabbing had become a critical issue. “There is a contradiction between what the Centre says and what is implemented on the ground. The limits of Welfare State are becoming more and more evident,” said PV Rajgopal. Prof Saxena said that land can not be detached from the larger resource system. And that it has to be supported by micro-economic assistance.

Questions were raised about ‘resistance to land reforms’ and about the reluctance shown in Planning Commission’s response on dealing effectively with absentee landlords, plantations and charitable and educational institutions. This response was seen as one of the prominent ways through which land reform initiatives were being subverted. Examples of Japan and Korea were cited in support of redistribution of land and small farm model.

The panel also discussed that land was no longer seen as agriculturally productive but as a commercial asset. “When we speak of land, we think of redistributive justice but there are others who view land as commodity, today, there are clearly two land agendas” said Prof Praveen Jha. Is land going to be availed for life and survival or for commercialization?. Shri Govindacharys brought on the cultural argument saying that “land does not belong to me, I belong to the land”. Others said that under the Constitution of India right to food enshrines right to land.

The meeting discussed various points in depth. Prof S B Saxena, felt that one should wait for the reports from the States

Comments: PV Rajgopal

Contradiction between what the government says and what is implemented on the ground, with respect to Forest Rights Act.

Resistance to land reforms

Limit of ‘Welfare State’ becoming more and more apparent

From day one, planning commission has not been too enthused about agrarian reform
Large scale 'land grabbing' is a critical issue
Rural Development Ministry, says it has sent the report for feedback to the states. These are delay tactics.

There is no logic in looking at what planning commission has written in absence of review from the states. – Saxena.

By and large there is an endorsement of the Committee's Report – Jha

Endorsement on things that are not as central – on existing policy, not on substantive policy

Ceiling limits cannot be implemented with retrospective effect. Our position is that it should be reduced.

Lot of land has come under irrigation and need to address of those related to land

Land cannot be viewed in isolation as part of larger resource system, it has to be supported by micro-economic assistance

Absentee landlords – it was done in Japan. Why is planning commission is supporting them?

Issues concerning land, are not addressed.

Category of plantations should be done away with – this is one of prominent ways through which land reform is subverted.

Pt 17 a and b taken from the UPA manifesto.

The presentation of points, distorts their meaning.

The allotment of land (free of cost) to landless would lead to loss of revenue. If you look at the total exemptions given to corporate houses...8 Per cent of Govt GDP.

If you look at the annexures...we have given a lot details on first and secondary data...based on govt sources.. on land acquired for industrial and non-agricultural purposes

Land leasing within ceiling limit should be removed – was a majority view...planning commission critical

Overall substantive issues such as land ceiling not agreed to

Procedural issues agreed upon.

SS Johar Committee, economist, opposition to ceiling on land

Look at Ceiling limits in Japan and South Korea. Look at the productivity.

In 1970s pet themes was why small farms were more productive. Please do not look at land in isolation.

Pt 30 should be reiterated. It's important that Panchayat be made in charge of wastelands.

Central government should allocate investment towards agrarian reforms

Gram daan villages have not been mentioned – eg in Rajasthan..with respect to Bhoodan lands. Most of the report focuses on Bihar. 50 per cent of bhoodan land locked with Bihar. Rest in AP and few other states.

We should identify members who are close to our views.

The State response to the Committee Report should be awaited. Andaman and Goa has responded.

Neo-liberalism reform – land no longer as productive asset but as commercial asset

Agreement to survey land aimed at cornering land

People as productive assets

Land is the most important commodity

Commercialisation of land – when we speak of land issues we think of social justice. Redistributive justice. To judge land by productivity would work against that belief.

(Small farms – tend to come under pressure of market. Farmers loose land. But, productivity determined by means not market. Productivity to sustain family. It is emerging in food security issues.)

We have to contain ourselves to 8 – 10 points.

We must redistribute land. Whatever way possible. Wherever farmers get land they should be assisted.

Land reform is not going to happen without building pressure on the government

Both the Centre and State government are taking policy decision taking land from people to corporations. Govt not willing to withdraw this policy.

There are two land agendas, unless we tackle their to show that its not socially just...

Right to food or right to land

Entitlement/ Rights debate has its limitations.

Commercialisation of land has to be addressed. It is the prime source of income for the State.

Land for life, land for survival vs land commercialization

Land does not belong to me I belong to land. This is a cultural argument. (Govindacharya)

Not enough studies to show that small holdings are economically productive.

Civil society working today on entitlements and NREGA..

Shift in govt strategy since 1970s – has promoted non right based strategies, soft agendas, NGO-isation, etc.

Project of democratization is also partially responsible for alienation from the land issue

8 lakh hectares acquired in Bihar by Kisan Sabha Sangh...

Kisan Sabha is against imposing ceiling on land.

Presentation on Janstiyagrah 2012.

Swami Agnivesh ji= nonimplementation of land and forest rights lead to violence.

Mount a pressure on government of India during parliament session.

Direct dialogue with media.

The meeting was concluded with a presentation by Ran Singh Parmar, describing the preparations being made by Ekta Parishad for Jansatyagraha 2012.

Planning Commission's response to 83 pts

Some general observations:

1. The response covers 8 heads: Land Ceiling, Government Land, Bhoodan Lands, Forest Lands, Land Rights of Nomads, Women and Rights, Tenancy and Sub-Tenancy and Homestead Rights.

The 8 heads cover the recommendations featured in Executive Summary, Chapter: 1, 2 and 4.

[Chapter 1: 'Land Ceiling and Distribution of Ceiling Surplus, Government and Bhoodan Land; Chapter 2: 'Tenancy and Sub-Tenancy and Homestead Rights; and Chapter 4: 'Alienation of Tribal and Dalit Lands']

2. Dominant position across the 83 pts indicate political unwillingness to address the issue of:

a) land ceiling (remark featured eg., 'The land ceiling limits cannot be implemented with retrospective effort'); [Pt 1]

b) benami/ farzi ownership of land in the name of charitable and or religious institutions (remark featured, 'land ceiling cannot be uniform'); [pt. 4 & 5]

c) exemptions given to lands under category of 'plantations', (remark featured, 'it will lead to switch over to other crops'); [pt. 6]

d) definition of landless poor, (remark featured, 'the landless persons may not be poor'); [pt 17 a]

e) distribution of land (remark featured, 'The policy of distribution of land in small units has to be discouraged because it will lead to subdivision and fragmentation of holdings which has adverse effect on productivity'); [pt. 17 b]

f) allotment of land to landless to be done free of cost (remark featured, 'This cannot be supported as it would cause loss of revenue/ will cause misuse of land/ discourage proper utilisation of land'); [pt.21]

g) leasing of lands (remark featured, 'how will it improve poor people's access to land'); [pt 26]

h) tribal rights (remark featured, 'encroachment should be checked completely and sternly'); [pt 37]

i) encroachment cases slapped under Wildlife Act (remark featured, 'Penal action may be

essential to safeguard forest and wildlife acts’); [pt 44]

j) Amend Land Acquisition Act with ref to tribal areas, (remark featured, ‘Agrees but adds a caveat that R&R should be applied before acquiring land’); [pt. 45]

k) primitive tribes must be exempt under FRA (featured remark, ‘ practice of false claims must be stopped / dependence and encroachment on forest land should be minimal / Alternate livelihood practices have to be developed’); [pt 56]

l) 10 to 15 cents of land to each houseless poor, (remark featured, ‘the emphasis has to shift from distribution of land to providing livelihood and income generating strategies’); [pt 80]

m) social homogeneity should be kept in account while settling people, (remark featured, ‘People’s participation has to be encouraged in development of infrastructure). [pt. 82 & 83]

(i) Wherever there is reference to land reform in the form of imposing a ceiling on holdings, monitoring of benami/ farzi land, exemptions given on land in name of religious, charitable institutions or plantations, leasing of land or allotment of homesteads, the stock reply is: ceiling limit cannot be imposed with retrospective effect /land ceiling cannot be uniform / The policy of distribution of land in small units has to be discouraged because it will lead to subdivision and fragmentation of holdings which has adverse effect on productivity/ emphasis has to shift from distribution of land to providing livelihood and income generating strategies.

D Bandyopadhyay Committee Report suggests one definition for land (as was done in the amendment added in 1981 to sub section 7 of Section 2 of the West Bengal Land Reform Act, 1955):

‘Land’ means land of every description and includes tank, tank-fishery, fishery, homestead and land used for purpose of livestock breeding, poultry farming, dairy or land comprised in tea garden, mill, factory workshop, orchard, hat, bazaar, ferries, tolls and land having any other sairati interests and any other land together with interests and benefits arising out of land and things attached to earth or permanently fastened to anything attached to the earth.’

(ii) small land holdings;

There is clear evidence that the smaller farms utilise land more efficiently, and labour absorption and employment generation on small farms is much more compared to medium and large counterparts.

Small holdings ensure food security and improve rural employment.

Farms contributing more internally generated labour stand at an advantage vis-à-vis farms hiring more labour.

The amount of land deemed just by DB Committee for a family of 5 is suggested as 15 acres (as is provided for under Sect 4 of the Bihar Ceiling Act) [pt. 5.14.4]

On ‘landless poor’

(i) Landless person may not be poor!

Response to PC: ‘A landless poor is not only more likely to be poor, but it is also more likely to be labourer or a cultivator’ (pg 11, DB Committee Report)

Landlessness aggravates poverty, forced migration

Landlessness retards development of agriculture

‘The absence of land reform continues not only feudal domination but also assures a continuing supply of cheap labour without which the Green Revolution in Punjab or the miracle of Maharashtra and Gujarat could hardly been possible’

On Tribal Rights

The gist in terms of comments appears to give prominence to the Wildlife Act over Forest Rights Act. So the assurance that tribal rights would be protected, sounds somewhat hollow.

The suggestion of the planning commission that people should be weeded away from seeking land towards other livelihood options such as income generating schemes building of infrastructure, has mala fide overtones.