



FIAN E-News Letter

Newsletter of FIAN West Bengal

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Editorial:

FIAN West Bengal is pleased to introduce its monthly news letter on the Human Rights to Food. FIAN stands for Food First Information and Action Network and the main objective of FIAN is to aware the common people about their right to food and feed themselves.

Food First Information and Action Network, West Bengal is a chapter of FIAN international working relentlessly towards mainstreaming right to food in India since 1991.

The most basic human right of all, the right to food as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is not guaranteed to the majority of the world's peoples. Despite abundance in food production more than 850 million people remain hungry in the world of which 294 million hungry and malnourished people live in South Asian countries alone. Poverty and hunger are grim reality in these countries and the situation has been further worsened due to invasion of food imperialism, which threatens the diversity of the peoples' food cultures and their national, cultural and ethnic identities. Hunger in the third world results from such economic, agricultural and trade policies which are shaped by the powerful developed countries and their allies at global, regional and national levels and imposed on poor countries in order to maintain and increase the political, economic, cultural and military hegemony of the powerful actors within the current process of global economic restructuring.

The intricate issues concerning the food security of the poor are being widely debated and discussed among the different stakeholders of civil society and policy makers in India in the background of widespread incidence of extreme hunger, under-nourishment and starvation deaths in different parts of the country. Though only 35% of country's population reportedly lives below poverty line as per the official statistics, since the 1990s, real poverty of the people at large has worsened in India due to the impact of liberalisation of economy which has resulted into destruction of livelihood opportunities for socially and economically marginal groups in the country.

FIAN is working to highlight the root causes of food insecurity of the people and to draw the attention of the government and civil society at large on the issues relating to hunger, chronic malnutrition and starvation death resulting into violations of RTF. FIAN refers to national and international human rights instruments/provisions and puts major emphasis on the role of the state in realising the right to food and feed oneself of the people. India is a state party to ICESCR and ICCPR which means that the state is duty bound to ensure full realisation of right to adequate food in the country for everybody. Moreover right to food is also enshrined in the Indian constitution as a derived right in Article 21 under the fundamental right to life. Therefore any incidence of hunger, chronic malnutrition or starvation death in India is a violation of a fundamental human right that is right to food and feed oneself. Full realisation of right to adequate food requires awareness of the people, in particular affected communities, to fight back against violations and to claim their rights. It also calls new focuses on policies and initiatives that can ensure an enabling environment in which people could enjoy and exercise their social, economic and cultural rights, in particular right to feed oneself, in dignity. Therefore besides making people aware of their rights FIAN WB also sensitises the state authorities to adopt appropriate policy measures for ending structural exploitations and inequity in the country by ensuring sustainable access to productive resources by the people and also access to food security programmes and schemes.

Therefore FIAN WB not only tries to make people aware of their rights but also sensitises the state authorities to motivate them to adopt appropriate policy measures to end structural exploitations and inequity in the country by ensuring sustainable access to productive resources by the people and also access to food security programmes and schemes.

We invite your valuable opinion, suggestions and comments cooperation in our endeavor.

Food first: Recognizing the right to feed oneself as a fundamental right: This human right is enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations.

Information . FIAN informs victims about their right to feed themselves and alerts the general public about violations of this right to have an exact knowledge.

Action. This is the centerpiece of FIAN's work. Through the interventions and Fact Finding Missions to areas of conflict, FIAN s supports enforcement of the right to food.

Network: FIAN is a network of members. sections and co – ordinations in more than 60 countries

Right to Food: A Fundamental Human Right

By Parama Ukil

The right to be free from hunger and malnutrition is a fundamental human right of every woman, man, youth and child. United Nations has mentioned from the very beginning that access to adequate food is both an individual right and a collective responsibility. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family including food". Nearly 20 years later, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) developed these concepts more fully and it has also stressed that everyone has the right to adequate food. Right to be free from hunger is a fundamental right.

Governments have agreed upon various social, economic and human development objectives at world conferences in Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing, Istanbul and elsewhere..

Governments have emphasized that to achieve these objectives sustainable food security should be ensured to every citizens of the world. The right to adequate food is also enshrined in legal terms in the most basic international human rights treaties, including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 1974 Universal Declaration on Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition has enunciated that "every man, women and child has an inalienable right to be free from hunger. However the reality lies in the fact that 433 million in India survive on less than 1.00\$ per day and that India has the largest number in the world's poor.



The right to freedom from hunger is a fundamental human right. Every state has an obligation to ensure, at the very least, that people do not starve. The right to food and right to life are interrelated because if food security is not ensured the right to life is violated in consequence. Food security is contingent on 3 parameters – availability, accessibility and affordability. Availability and accessibility are related to production and distribution of resources. The question of affordability is linked to Amartya Sen's concept of "endowment" and "exchange entitlements" i.e. the resources at one's disposal that determines one's capacity to buy food. People should have physical and economic access to food at all and the food should be sufficient and adequate to maintain a healthy life. It is the primary responsibility of the state to ensure food security for everyone within their territory. In addition to the adequacy of food, the cultural acceptability of food should also be maintained because the type of food consumption is largely dependent on the cultural social and environmental background of the people. It means that the food should be produced in a manner that is environmentally and socially sustainable



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The cost of food should be affordable and the means of food procurement should also be easily accessible. The provision of food security should not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights. The protection of other socio – economic rights and civil and political rights should not be threatened in the process of ensuring right to food. The states should realize the fact that providing adequate resources is not the only factor to improve the situation of Food Security because food security is heavily dependent on socio – economic , cultural and environmental factors as discussed above. The human right to adequate food includes:

- ✚ The human right to be free from hunger.
- ✚ The human right to access to safe drinking water.
- ✚ The human right to access to resources, including energy for cooking.
- ✚ The human right to the highest *attainable* standard of physical and mental health.

Despite the fact that the right to food is recognized directly or indirectly by all countries in the world poverty, hunger and malnutrition co – exists in major parts of the world especially in the third world countries. Hunger-related illness adds to household costs and increases the burden of care for healthy family members often already struggling for subsistence. This hardship is multiplied by millions of families worldwide creating a devastating ripple effect which acts as an impediment in the path of global development

When the violation of right to food is concerned it is often seen that women are the worst sufferers.. Women play a very important role in the production of food. But they are discriminated in many respects and their food security is not ensured in most of the poor countries. Women are active at every point in the food chain and are often responsible for protecting the integrity of food and ensuring its wholesomeness and safety [FAO 2005]. The right to feed oneself is a fundamental right as enshrined in the ECOSOC. During last decade the process of globalization and liberalization has worsened the poverty and malnutrition scenario of the world. The problem does not lie with the amount of resources. The basic problem is the distribution of resources. We can see that the poor peasants who are responsible for the production of food are the major victims of starvation. ,. Market – oriented production has posed risks to household food Thus it can be seen that hunger is not a problem of means but of rights.

The nation states party in the ECOSOC as well as the international communities are duty bound to respect, protect and fulfill the right to feed oneself and eradicating hunger is not merely a lofty ideal. Ensuring the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger is a matter of international law, specifically enshrined in a number of human rights instruments to which states around the world have committed themselves and therefore the need of the hour is to develop a human rights approach which can turn the people into claimants of rights and does not perceive them as recipients of aid. Human rights empower the victims and make their voices being heard at national and international level. Human rights set minimum criteria for states behaviour, as the international human rights system is recognized by most of the states. The right to food has proven to be a powerful legal concept that can be used in campaigning for social justice.

Reference Economic and Political Weekly Vol XL No 25 : Gender and Food Security
United Nations Atlas of the Oceans

FIAN WEST BENGAL IN MAINSTREAMING RIGHT TO FOOD

West Bengal, is a state of Eastern India which played a pioneering role in implementing land reform measures to empower toiling peasants in 70s. According to the HDR 2005 small/marginal peasants and agricultural laborers constitute 70% of the state's population and depend directly or indirectly on agricultural activities for their livelihood. Despite economic growth in the state 32% of people in West Bengal live Below Poverty Level and the majority of them live in rural areas. The Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minorities account for more than half of the population in West Bengal and they represent the most vulnerable and poorest groups in the state. Agriculture continues to be the most prominent economic activity contributing more than 50% of GDP.

Since 1996, the agricultural production has been steadily declining in the state due to various economic problems like increase in the price of inputs, crop failure and indebtedness of farmers etc. The process of liberalization has adversely affected the small and marginal farmers of the state as various policies induced by of multilateral institutions and international financial institutions like subsidy reduction, promotion of cash cropping, opening up agri-market for big corporate giants etc. have worsened the situation. These factors have resulted in market imperfections and crisis and have caused economic hardship to the poor farmers.

The impact of Land Reforms in the state could be seen in increase in the average land holdings, increase in numbers of registered sharecroppers, expansion of formal credit network and establishment of agricultural co – operative societies throughout 80s. But gradually the whole scenario has turned into a reverse. The rate of registration of sharecroppers has declined. The cost of cultivation has increased, cultivation of food crops has been replaced by cash crops, extensive use of HYV seeds and GM seeds are noticed and heavy doses of fertilizers and pesticides are used in the field of agriculture. Large scale privatization of water in the rural areas has limited the access of poor farmers to water for irrigation purposes. While the credit facilities provided by the state have failed miserably to cater the need of the poor (Only 40% of the poor peasants could be covered under the cooperative credit systems), the private moneylenders have started charging exorbitant rates of interest for timely agricultural input requirements. New methods of farming have made replaced the traditional skills and knowledge in agriculture and have led to large scale destruction of ecology. Government supported extension services have also failed to educate the farmers on appropriate farm practices and input use. Approximately 13% of poor peasants have lost their land by the year 2000, due to inadequate agricultural support services and lack of access to inputs for agriculture. It has been noticed during the past few years that despite land distribution, the number of landless households have also increased. In 1987 – 88 the percentage of landless households were 39.6% and the year 2000 it was 49.87%. The allocations of land title (pattas) under and reform measures have reinforced gender inequality in West Bengal. Less than 10% of the total pattas have been distributed in the joint name of husband and wife. Women as single holders of patta account for less than 6% of total patta. Gender discrimination is highly prevalent in West Bengal with respect to the distribution of land. Thus the benefit of land reforms was relatively short lived.

The sad reality in the state today is that farmers are committing suicide and dying of starvations. The per capita food grain consumption has declined from 476 grams per day in 1990 to only 418 grams per day in 2001. The aggregate calorie consumption per capita declined from 2200 calories per day in 1987 – 88 to around 2150 calories in 1999 – 2000. Thus the policies of land alienation have resulted in malnutrition, hunger and starvation. There is practically very little pro poor development in the rural areas of West Bengal. The employment scenario also presents a very grim picture. The rural employment growth rate is less than 0.6% per annum which is only one – third of the rate of growth of rural population. The right to food of a large number of landless agricultural laborers, sharecroppers and marginal farmers are violated and the trend is frightening. The recent policies of the state government neglect agrarian sector and puts emphasis on large-scale industrialization. The state government is bent upon amending the rural land ceiling act allowing big corporate houses to enter in the agri business. More alarming is the fact that the state government is rejecting agriculture as 'backward' economic practice and encouraging/forcing the small holders and marginal peasants to sell out their agricultural land for industrialization. The recent proposal of the State government to invite Salim Group of Industrialists from Indonesia is a concrete example of how the livelihoods of the peasants are threatened.

The investment proposal for West Bengal includes an industrial park as well as "health" and "knowledge" cities and a 53-mile four-lane road. The 5,100 acres of land has been identified in North and South 24 Parganas districts and would be made available at the market price. The Salim group would also invest Rs 225 crore in a motor cycle factory in Howrah also. Besides, the Bakhri group of Indonesia has agreed to invest Rs 100 crore in a coal mixing plant to be set up at Haldia in East Midnapore. According to the state government the projects would generate lakhs of jobs.

Currently, there are 7 million jobless people in the state and majority of them living in rural areas. The project would require conversion of fertile agricultural land "Acquisition of fertile, multi-cropped plots will be unavoidable," Ashoke Mitra, a former West Bengal communist finance minister, wrote in the latest issue of the Economic and Political Weekly journal. "The consequence will be conceivably a significant loss of both farm output and farm employment." This would therefore intensify the crisis of starvations in the state and would lead to increase in unemployment. The employment opportunities which would be created by these projects would require certain degree of education and skills and it is obvious that the poor toiling peasants would not be the immediate beneficiaries of the development. Destruction of livelihoods due to activities of state and failure of the state to protect people from third party activities which destroy livelihoods of people are violations of right to food. The need of the hour is to make people aware of the imminent impact of these proposed projects and to hold state accountable for meeting their obligations under human rights.

Water Privatisation: A threat to Right to Water

Right to waWater is an international human right. Water is a community resource. But in today's globalized world water has been privatized and it has been transferred to the large companies from the hands of the communities. People are facing lots of crisis and hardship due to the privatization of water services and its commodification. The access to adequate and quality water is both a human right and a community right. Since water is a Common Property Resource (CPR) for all, it must be protected and should not be monopolized by a few. The desertification of earth and the depletion of ground water resources are a spreading disaster. The planet's fresh water system has been affected greatly due to unsustainable irrigation practices, deforestation, river erosion, global warming and construction of dams. People centred model of development has always been neglected and proper measures have not been adopted to cope with the disastrous consequences. Due to the above factors we find that there has been always a large amount of disparity between the rich and the poor regarding access to water and many people have been displaced from their homes due to water related multipurpose projects. Thus a large section of the vulnerable community is facing threats of livelihood security due to rapid industrialization and water privatization. The local level self – governance and the Panchayat system should be highly effective to deal with the problems of water crisis.

Due to the corporate interests in water and global nexus of big business lobby organisations the water resources and services have been commercialised. The World Bank and the Water Corporations like Global Water Partnership, World Water Council and World Commission on Water are promoting privatisation and export of water through global links with corporations and financial institutions. Thus, in order to earn high profit they are separating the water from the commons to which it belongs.






The dominant economic model of globalization has encouraged the use of market forces to trade in water. The public control over water resources have been slowly diminishing due to privatization. The loan system of International Monetary Fund and the Structural Adjustment Policies etc have forced many debt ridden countries to privatize their water supplies.

The recent trend towards water conservation is definitely a threat to the WTO policies. Many communities are fighting back against the “theft of water”. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, the movements in Kashipur district of Orissa and Plachimada in Kerala are some of the significant steps of protest against water privatization. The community management of water and sustainable use of the resource should also be considered to fulfill the needs of the upcoming generations. Fian West Bengal has been actively participating in the advocacy lobby and campaigns to make people aware of the right to water. Government should take initiatives for the protection of this public trust. Right to water is an important part of the right to food and Fian West Bengal had conducted some Fact Finding Missions in the areas where the right to water has been violated. It has been noticed that women are severely affected when incidents of water privatization takes place. This is another particular area where Fian West Bengal takes major initiatives to protect the victims since it right to water in the future and will play an important role to save this “community resource” from privatization and commodification.

works for the protection of Gender Rights. Fian West Bengal will continue to work for the protection of

NEWS FROM FIAN West Bengal

Present Cases

-  **Eviction threats faced by people in Dandi , Orissa**
-  **Lake Camp eviction in Rabindra Sarovar, Kolkata**
-  **Violation of right to work of the workers of foundry sector, Howrah**
-  **Right to food violation in tea garden of North Bengal**
-  **Erosion of river Ganga and violation of human rights in Malda**

Focuses of FIAN West Bengal:

1. Gender and Land Rights
2. Campaign on Agrarian Reform
3. Rights of Marginal
Fishermen/Fish workers
4. Land Rights Development Induced
Displacement
5. Rights of Self-Employed Urban
Poor

The Training of Trainers Programme at Kolkata

The TOT at Kolkata is an initiative of FIAN West Bengal to familiarize the leading social activists, with human rights approaches in general and FIAN's approaches in particular, so that a process of future cooperation and sharing among the activists could be initiated. Selected participants from various grassroots - level as well as national - level organizations participated in this programme. Participants received training on key concepts, methodologies and tools of human rights, especially on right to food. The objectives of this TOT were:

- To create awareness on the Human Rights approach and the Right to Food Concept
- To enhance the understanding of participants on the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the related General Comments No. 12 and 15 on the right to food and water

To analyze human rights violations and the corresponding states obligations, To get familiar with FIAN and its particular approach, To be in a position to plan and conduct field research on right to food violations and to document and analyze the results for further follow up To develop teaching and facilitation skills FIAN aims to develop a shadow report on right to food in India next year. This TOT was an attempt to involve other like-minded organizations in this process.



The Forthcoming Fact Finding Missions (FFM)

FIAN West Bengal has taken initiative to conduct an international FFM in the month of December 2005, which will comprise of the representatives of various international human rights organizations. The main objective of the FFM is to get an impression of the status of right to food in eastern India by investigating few major cases of violations. The proposed cases are the Lake Camp Eviction of Kolkata, the violation of right to food of the workers of the foundry sector in Howrah, the eviction threat faced by the people of Dandi island in Orissa and the human rights violations of the victims of River Erosion in Malda district. The main aim of the FFM is to understand the real situation and analyze the factors which affect the right to food and the role played by the State Authorities in this respect. The FFM team will publish reports which will be circulated afterwards to different human rights organizations and a copy will be submitted to the respective State Representatives in India and also to United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Starvation Deaths in Tea Garden: A Short Report

The issue of starvation deaths in the tea gardens of West Bengal has been drawing attention of media and human rights organizations for the past few years. FIAN West Bengal is concerned with the issue as these deaths are consequences of violations of Right to Food. The chapter has been campaigning and organizing advocacy and lobby work to highlight the issue. Till date 25 tea gardens in West Bengal are closed down and 35,000 workers lost their job. Government has failed to provide proper rehabilitation facilities to the unemployed workers. Moreover there is no concrete policy of the Government to revive this sick industry which is suffering from unequal competition in the global market due to liberalization policy of the state.

One member of Fian West Bengal Miss Souti Sarkar recently visited a tea garden and conducted preliminary investigations with local organizations and representatives of tea industry to understand the type of human rights violations. This particular issue is one of the case studies of Fian West Bengal and initiatives are being taken by Fian west Bengal so that the state authorities ensure food security of the victims immediately and also develop adequate rehabilitation strategies for them in near future.

NEWS on Right To Food in West Bengal

Urban Eviction

Illegal Conversion of Low/Agricultural Land for Construction Business: The conversion of wetlands has been taking place in West Bengal for so called developmental purposes. For construction of business projects and high rise buildings many such lands have been converted which has caused a threat to thousands of urban poor who depend solely on these lands for their livelihood purposes. The wetlands are a Common Property Resource and any conversion of such lands are strictly restricted by national laws. However, illegal conversions take place violating the right to food of the people depending on these lands. The state representatives are reluctant to take any steps against the third parties engaged in such conversions, as the interests of some are violated. FIAN West Bengal is in close touch with the local groups of the Bantala Wetland region and it is also organizing for further documentation and campaigns in this

Mapping Starvation deaths in West Bengal

Starvation deaths have become a National Phenomenon while there is a surplus stock of food grains in government godowns. People in Murshidabad and Malda districts are dying of starvation while the government authorities have not taken any effective action to stop the deaths. The areas are under threat of insufficient nutritious food, but no government programmes to address starvation are properly functioning in the area, despite the fact that the local authorities are well aware of what is going on. The hunger in Murshidabad district has affected the villagers so badly that a large number have been displaced to other areas looking for means to survive. The failure of the Public Distribution System and the poor functioning of the social security schemes are largely responsible for this grim situation. Apart from this, fertile agricultural land, houses, cattle and everything are being ruined, and the environmental conditions are worsening and the local people are falling prey to starvation.

Starvation deaths of the tea garden workers is an important phenomenon in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal which has occurred due to the lack of comprehensive policy of the State Government. Many tea gardens have been declared as lock outs and sick industries which led to the starvation deaths of the poor workers and their families. Due to the decline of manufacturing in small scale sectors the tea industry is suffering from major economic crisis and the workers are unemployed and consuming as low as 200 calories per day which ultimately leads to starvation deaths.

WTO Ministerial Meeting in December

The sixth WTO Ministerial Conference will be held in Hong Kong, China from 13th to 18th December 2005. This meeting will be a crucial one since the trade majors in the WTO hope to conclude the Doha Round Negotiations (Doha Development Agenda) during this meeting. This meeting will decide about the different policy decisions regarding the next step of W.T.O. in the different third world countries concerning different treaties of trade. It has been known that the strong developing country groupings are vulnerable to arm – twisting tactics by the developed countries. If the major trading powers succeed in conducting the WTO Doha Development Agenda with firm commitments on market access, domestic supports and regulations and subsidies in the areas of agriculture, industry and services, the process of global trade liberalization will be speeded up and the ambit of the WTO will be further expanded into domestic national policy and public procurement of goods and services. Even the TRIP agreement over which there have been significant disagreements is now threatening to proceed at the benefit of big pharmaceuticals and Trans National Corporations. Many human rights organizations and NGOs will take part in the protest movements during the conference. The representatives of FIAN West Bengal will also take part in the protest campaigns in Hong Kong. Prior to this conference it will organize some parallel meetings regarding policies of WTO. FIAN will also organize lobby and advocacy campaigns to make people aware of the WTO policies.

Land Ceiling Abolishment Act:

The state of West Bengal is well known for its Land Reform measures. But today there has been a reverse trend of these measures, which has become a controversial issue. The Land Ceiling Abolishment Act has come into force which will lead to further alienation of marginal people. Poor people will be forcibly evicted from urban areas and agricultural land will be taken away from the rural people in the name of industrialization. These can have several negative impacts since it is an anti people policy.

Urban Affairs Minister Ram Jethmalani has proposed the repeal of the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976, in the belief that this would improve drastically the housing situation in the country. But, given the history of the legislation, his attempt is unlikely to succeed. FIAN West Bengal wants to raise the voice against this issue. This kind of policy can have worsening effects on the rural people and right to food of the poor people will be violated if the cultivable lands are taken away from them in the name of so called "development". FIAN West Bengal wants to aware the vulnerable communities regarding their right to food. Consultation meetings have been organized and policy advocacies will also be undertaken to ensure the right to food of the vulnerable groups.

Act Against Domestic Violence 2005

This September the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) will expire. Originally passed in 1994, VAWA revolutionized the way society addressed domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. During the past decade, VAWA has provided tremendous resources and protections for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. NCADV is a part of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women. The National Task Force was instrumental in the drafting and passage of both the original VAWA in 1994 and the reauthorization in 2000. During the past decade, VAWA has saved lives and helped millions of victims find safety, security and self-sufficiency.. VAWA '05 provides a comprehensive approach to survivors' housing needs that includes expanding transitional housing options, ensuring that victims can come forward without jeopardizing their current or future housing, creating permanent housing solutions that help develop communities and build collaborations between service providers, government agencies and housing developers. VAWA provides practical solutions to improving the response of the criminal justice and legal systems by expanding funding for local groups working with underserved communities, strengthening the criminal justice response to sexual assault, providing services for children and youth, and advocating for effective prevention programs. So the Act should be reauthorized and the existing VAWA programs should be enhanced and new programs should be included that better respond to community needs.

Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food (VGRF)

FIAN has for years been lobbying intensively with the FAO to take up a rights based approach to food security and to adopt a new international legal instrument fostering the implementation of the right to food. As enshrined in ICESCR. As a result, the World Food Summit : five years later took the decision to formulate a set of voluntary guidelines that would serve as a human right's based framework for the specific programmes of the FAO as well as the nation states aimed at reducing hunger and malnutrition. The voluntary guidelines on Right to Food (VGRF) is an important new instrument to combat hunger because it challenges one of the main causes of hunger, the lack of political will of states to take concrete

measures for progressive realization of right to food. A Civil society coalition driven by FIAN was instrumental in pressuring for the opening up of negotiations on the guidelines within the FAO structure. From the very beginning FIAN West Bengal was involved in the process and contributed meaningfully towards development and adoption of VGRF. Presently FIAN West Bengal is taking initiative for creating awareness on VGRF, through its usual sensitization programmes, lobbying and media advocacy. The other set of functions will include organizing seminars and workshops with different stakeholders like legislatures, politicians, policy makers, NGOs, CSOs and judiciary for dissemination of information related to relevance of VGRF in India. FIAN West Bengal would also publish documents and info sheets on VGRF in regional languages for effective awareness of the common masses and victims of violations.

Right to Information:

The Right to Information Bill has been recently passed in 2005. While the right to know is not explicitly spelt out in the Indian Constitution, the Supreme has mentioned in several cases that this right is inherent in the right to freedom of speech and expression (Article 19) as well as the right to life and liberty (Article 21). However, the right to information Bill, 2005 has gone far in putting together a mechanism for citizens to secure information under the control of the Government and undoubtedly encourage the empowerment of people to exercise their rights. The Right to Information if properly implemented would evolve an efficient and prompt system of grievance redressal that subsequently would lead the citizens towards the creation of a well equipped society to demand their rights authoritatively. The right to information can generate demand for a just and equitable society and much more ingenuous enjoyment of various other rights for the people. Having a great deal of concern for the individual's right to feed oneself, we can envisage the Right to Information being utilized by the people for fighting against the discrepancies in the public distribution system (PDS) and various other components. Though it is not the panacea for all the problems, it definitely has the potential to keep a vigilant eye on the corruption penetrated in the public distribution system. Policy ramifications can also be triggered, driven by the collected information. But the Act has certain limitations. Although it is based substantially on the bold draft prepared by the national Advisory Council (NAC), the Right to Information Bill contains a few provisions that can dilute its effectiveness. The road from enacting a law for the Right to Information and to making it available and accessible to people is a long and complex one. After a meaningful law in place, the task remains to implement so as to achieve the longer term objectives to strengthen democratic values and institutions in the country by introducing the accountability and transparency in the administrative machinery that are traits of open government. Nonetheless, a fair deal of political will, bureaucratic support, resource commitment in terms of time, money and manpower and most importantly awareness among people, altogether will constitute the life-blood of the implementation process.

Food sovereignty workshop at Kolkata

A food sovereignty workshop will take place in Kolkata from 19th to 24th September at Hotel Kenilworth which will be jointly organized by Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) and Institute for Motivating Self Employment (IMSE). The major focus of this workshop will be on the concept of food sovereignty, an emerging new model of development which challenges the existing model. This new model will recognize the right to adequate food and feed oneself and will ensure sustainable development which will be economically, culturally and socially appropriate and justiciable. Various well – known social and human rights organizations from South and South – East Asia t will take part in this workshop . Representatives from FIAN West Bengal would also take part in this workshop

UN Rapporteur Visiting India

Mr. Jean Ziegler, the U.N. Rapporteur on the Right to food visited India from 20th August to 1st September to get a better impression on status of right to food in the country.. The Mission team included Mr. Jean Ziegler, Mr. Carlos Lopez, Ms. Sally-Anne Way and Mr. Christophe Golay.



During his visit to Orissa Mr. Ziegler participated in a dialogue With NGOs /CSOs organized by FIAN West Bengal in collaboration with Agramee, Orissa. In the meeting key issues leading to hunger and starvation deaths in eastern India were discussed. A main focus of the dialogue was presence of the representatives of the victim communities suffering from violations of right to food. Mr. Ziegler and his team were very pleased to meet the organizations, in particular the people from the affected communities and promised to include those cases in his report. He further assured the participants that he would highlight those cases in the de – briefing session at Delhi in which senior state representatives would be present. He also urged the organizations to keep regular contact with the U.N. delegation and to provide the team with Fact Sheets concerning the cases mentioned in the meeting in order to facilitate the process of finalization of the report.

Coming Up Next:

A special Issue on Displacement in Eastern India

- Kashipur
- Lanjigarh
- Hazaribagh
- Sunderban
- Dandi Island
- Kolkata

and more

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Nilu Rani from IMSE (Orissa) – A Nominee for Noble Peace Prize 2005



In the history of Noble Peace Prize a new aspect has been introduced this year. 1000 women from different parts of the world are finally nominated for Noble Peace Prize and our very own “Niludi” is one among them.. She is a social activist of IMSE and is involved in various struggles for empowerment of rural poor in her area. Her name has always been associated with the Bhograi – Baliapal movement. In 1985 – 86 both State and Central Government planned to establish a missile base in the Bhograi – Baliapal region in Orissa. Social organisation IMSE organised protest movements to resist the project. Human rights organisation FIAN International as well as its local chapter FIAN West Bengal strengthened the protest movement by building national and international opinion among the civil society in order to pressurise the Government to stop the project. Nilu Rani took a leading role in mobilizing the common people, particularly the women to fight against the missile base project which threatened the livelihood security of villagers of 135 coastal villages. The struggle against the missile base was successful as the state had to abandon the project. However Nilu's work was not over, she continued to play an important role in various mass movements and raised her voice against the social and economic exploitation of women. She also organized the village women and made them aware regarding the harmful effects of shrimp monoculture, land alienation, pollution and other environmental hazards.

Nilu Rani has been nominated for the Noble Peace Prize for her meaningful contribution in anti – missile base movement in Orissa and also for her lifelong struggle and sacrifice to empower rural poor, in particular for empowerment of poor women. Though she is happy but the news of her nomination does not make her too euphoric. According to her this nomination is a recognition of the struggle of the people in Orissa. She wants to continue working among the people and wishes that the human rights of the people of Bhograi Baliapal region are duly recognized and protected.

We hope that the 1000 women who are being nominated for the Noble Peace Prize will get the award since all of them deserve it for their meaningful contribution to humanity

