

FIAN WEST BENGAL E-NEWS LETTER



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Imminent Eviction in Singur, West Bengal, Livelihoods of 15,000 poor at stake

More than 1500 peasants and their families as well as thousands of agricultural labourers, unregistered sharecroppers, cottage industry workers, local small business people etc altogether approximately 15,000 people in Singur Hooghly are living under the threat of imminent eviction from their livelihood as the Government of West Bengal has decided to acquire their agricultural lands for construction of "Tata Motors", a car manufacturing unit of Indian MNC Tata. The State has ordered the peasants to immediately stop sowing paddy (this is a paddy sowing season) in the above land and to accept the States decision of eviction.



The land would be acquired by the State through Land Acquisition Act, and would be leased /sold out to Tata at a subsidized rate.

The selected land which would soon be acquired is fertile agricultural land where the peasants grow normally three to four crops a year. The decision of the State Government to acquire this fertile land for "Tata Motors" surprised the peasants and many other Civil Society activists as the car manufacturing unit could easily be set up in other locations in the state, where adequate non agricultural land are available.

Moreover no adequate compensation / rehabilitation package is offered to the affected. Only one time monetary compensation is promised, which the peasants think would be below market price. No economic rehabilitation is offered to 15,000 peasants whose livelihoods would be directly affected, neither any compensation is offered to those agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and others who depend on these lands indirectly and would also be deprived of their livelihoods due to and acquisition. Peasant women would be severely affected as in most cases lands are not recorded in their names and they would not get the compensations themselves. Thus they will loss their access to food producing resources i.e. land and would be exposed to hunger and starvation. It may be mentioned here that acquisition of 1000 acres of fertile agricultural land in Singur, is part of the larger plan of the State Government to acquire 43000 acres of land (mostly agricultural) for industrial purposes in the state.

The peasants' resistance against this proposed eviction is gaining strength. FIAN West Bengal has come forward to support the affected persons by highlighting the right to food obligation of the state. India is a State party to the International Covenant on Economic Social Cultural Rights, and

therefore is duty bound under international law to respect and protect the right to food of all its citizens. Moreover, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution describes right to food and livelihoods with dignity as a fundamental right. International Human rights laws and national constitutional provisions clearly state that evictions leading to destruction of livelihoods should be avoided at any cost. Due to land acquisition in Singur, the right to food of the peasants in that area is severely threatened. This present initiative of the state to evict poor from their livelihoods in Singur is a clear violation of respect bound obligation of the state under RTF. The peasants in Singur demand:

- 1) The government must immediately stop all preparation for Eviction
- 2) Immediately allow peasants to carry out agricultural activities in Singur
- 3) Tata Car Manufacturing Unit to be constructed in another site where non – agricultural land is available

At the request of FIAN WB, FIAN International launched an ‘Urgent Action’ that is a protest letter campaign addressed to Chief Minister of West Bengal at international level and has also sent the information to UN Rapporteurs on RTF and Right o Housing, expressing concern on Singur case. FIAN International has also urged its members to write polite protest letters to the Indian Ambassadors on this issue in their respective countries. The need of the hour is to build a strong civil society opinion at national and international level so as to create pressure on West Bengal Government and Tata to reconsider the decision of eviction in Singur. We invite our readers to express their opinions on Singur eviction and on other similar evictions in our E-newsletter.

RTI used to collect Information on Singur Eviction

FIAN West Bengal filed an application using Right to Information Act to get detailed information on Governments’ plan related to Singur Eviction. The application was sent to District Magistrate Chinsura on July 12, 2006. As per the Act information should be provided within a month from the application. However, no response was received so far.

Meanwhile a group of human rights activists, who are sympathizers of FIAN WB, visited Singur and conducted a survey among the victims. The report of this survey will be published in the next issue of our E-newsletter.

Strategic Planning and Gender Workshop was organized in Hyderabad by FIAN

A Strategic Planning and Gender Workshop was organized in Hyderabad by FIAN International in collaboration with FIAN India. It was hosted by FIAN Andhra Pradesh. All FIAN units in India sent representatives. FIAN, Philippines also participated. The meeting focused on different future programs and focal area.

The following are the programmes selected by FIAN India for work in the future:-

Access to resources

FIAN members in India strongly feels that access to resources for food production determines food security of an individual or community, particularly in a country like India, where more than 70% people depend on primary economic activities for survival. In the new liberal era of globalization access to productive resources is highly contested and invasion of MNCs and TNCs on CPR have increased marginalization of rural and urban poor. The role of the state in ensuring access to resources is very weak and often in favour of the invaders. In this context FIAN sections in India want to highlight the states obligations to ensure free and fair access to productive resources for common people. FIAN in India will carry out action research, awareness and lobby work related to the issue of access to resources. .

RTI Workshop Organised in Kolkata

A two day State Level Workshop on Right to Information Act took place on June 26-27, 2006. This workshop was jointly organised by Institute for Motivating Self Employment (IMSE), Food first Information and Action Network (FIAN), West Bengal, and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), New Delhi. The workshop brought together 47 participants representing civil society organizations and media from 14 districts of West Bengal. Eminent persons like Dr. Bela Dattgupta noted academician and ex chairperson West Bengal Women's Commission, Shri Debabrata Bandyapadhyay, former secretary Ministry of Rural Development GOI, General secretary of FIAN and ED of IMSE Shri Biplab Halim and the newly appointed State Chief Information Commissioner Shri Arun Bhattacharya amongst many others who attended this workshop. The main purpose of the workshop was to create awareness about the key provisions of RTI Act 2005 as well as to discuss about the current status of implementation of the Act in the state. The workshop came out with a Charter of Demands unanimously adopted by all the participants.

2. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and other food security provisions

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or NREGA is a bold step forward to significantly improve the livelihood of millions of rural poor in India and could even go on reduce the rural underemployment. However, as is with every good Act in a country as vast as India-the implementation of the Act in certain aspects has not been keeping with the desired results. A major area of concern is whether it reaches the grass root level. FIAN Indian sections intend

to create a situation in which the implementation of the Act can be properly monitored in the various states of India by the villagers. FIAN further intends to look into and analyze the various food security and employment related schemes which are brought forth by the Government.

3. Right to Water

Water would be taken up as a programme by some FIAN Indian sections since it is closely related to the Right to Food and is extremely important for groups threatened by or suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Currently there is a great interest in Civil Society for the right to water FIAN can help on the basis of its experience to develop the right to water in a way that is consistent with the right to food and with ESCR in international law.

4. Gender and Justiciability.

Apart from the above, it was decided that FIAN India will mainstream the issues of gender and justiciability. It was decided that FIAN would take a dual track approach regarding the issue of gender aiming at both (i)gender mainstreaming (including gender disaggregated data on the case implications, applying gender sensitive languages in publications etc.) and (ii)specific measures focused on gender(specific training measures, field visits, networking of women's organization, specific gender staff and volunteers etc.)

In the field of justiciability FIAN India looks to develop the Right to Food as a complementary strategy in order to get the right enforced. The victims of violation of this right should be able to bring their case to the court and to get positive judgments including compensation for the damage suffered and guarantee for non-repetition. These are the areas which were identified during the Strategic Planning Meeting in Hyderabad for FIAN's work in the future.

With great pleasure we are announcing that FIAN West Bengal is launching its new website very soon called www.fianwb.org.

We would be highly grateful to you if you can send your comments and suggestions after the launch of our website.

Social Watch Process in West Bengal

(By Mrinal Mohanka)

“Social Watch Process Would Be The Key Agenda Setter For The Government. It Will Redefine The Politics Of Knowledge, And Usher In A New Dynamics In The Process And Quality Of Governance. It Will Reclaim The Process Of Governance To The People At Various Levels -National, State, And Panchayat.”

The aforesaid is the vision of the National Social Watch Process. The National Social Watch Coalition (NSWC) is an attempt to create a network of civil society organizations, citizens

and communities to work together in an attempt to create a method of monitoring governance of certain goals of social development within our country and particularly for the marginalized sections of Indian Society. In simple terms it tries to create means of monitoring the institutions of governance and tries to ensure that they follow the path that they are supposed to and work in the interests of the citizens and in accordance with the principles of democracy.

The National Social Watch Process is a result of the collective response of various organizations aiming to ensure development, social action groups and citizens to ensure that there is a critical engagement with the process of governance. This is a major part of the initiative to make democracy not only more meaningful, but also more participatory. The NSWC report is simply a platform and a forum where the citizens can come together, dialogue, debate, and reflect to ensure that people have a stake in governance and governance is pro-poor.



The approach of the Social Watch process is initiative as well as unique in the manner in which it investigates the functioning and efficiency of the key institutions of governance - executive (in terms of policy and practices), the judiciary, the legislative (represented by the parliament), and the institutions of local self-governance.

Every year, the Social Watch Citizens Report on Governance and development deals with monitoring the institutions of governance and democracy with the viewpoint of fundamental economic and social values such as rights, development, freedom, and security. The report examines the sensitivity, efficiency, and efficacy of the institutions of governance in ensuring three fundamental rights - health, education, and livelihood (food and work). This is done so as to ensure that the voice of the citizens gets recognized in the development process.

Social Watch has also decided to contribute and work towards the realization of various goals that the government seeks to achieve. One example of this is the MDG – The Millenium Development Goals. It would strive towards furthering the ownership of the MDG - from state owned to citizen owned through vigilant and responsive civil society coalitions. It would weave state based, and local civil society actions into a nation wide movement. It would seek to actualise the MDG as National/Peoples' Development Goals.

The State Social Watch process empowers civil society in general and grassroots actors in particular in West Bengal to play an active role in the governance of West Bengal and participate in decision making through social vigilance and monitoring as well as through documenting the performances of key institutions of governance so as to ensure social equity and justice.

The main Objectives of the State Social Watch process are to increase the accountability of the state, promoting inclusive democracy and ensuring a rights-based approach, social vigilance, networking of Civil Society Organizations (CSO's), monitoring the process of achieving the goals set by the government such as the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and last but not the least, developing a self reliant Social Watch process in each state.

In West Bengal, there has been a strong left rule for the last 28 years and it has been noticed that the poverty situation has worsened along with the fact that frequent hunger deaths have been reported. There is a lack of genuine political will, lack of sensitization of state, poor functioning of the Judiciary and uneven Economic Growth. To eradicate these problems, the state social watch has taken numerous steps. A core group has been formed to deal directly with the above mentioned problems. Also, more than 68 organizations are now actively involved, regional consultations are organized in the districts, participation in various summits

such as peoples summit against poverty, issues have been kept aside for branches of Social Watch to deal with and the media advocacy has been intensified. The issues that have been kept aside deal with various fields such as Food security, Functioning of Judiciary, Education, Health and Legislative issues.

The impact of the Social Watch process is highly admirable. Local authorities have been sensitized to a certain extent, Awareness of commons has increased and today there is a much Better orientation of SW volunteers.

The NSWC has already started planning for the future. Now they are working towards making expert committees more functional/effective, Intensifying Regional consultations, Organising State Social Watch Consultation at Kolkata, Monitoring and documentation of key institutions is to be continued and publication of the SSW Report 2006. In modern India though there is rapid progress in certain areas, others are left behind. The National Social Watch however, continues to keep a “watch” on the not so privileged sections of society.

Twenty-Eighth FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific , Jakarta , 2006

“Helping to build a world without hunger” – this is the slogan of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. According to FAO, “achieving food security for all” is at the heart of FAO’s efforts – which primarily deal with ensuring that people have regular access to adequate, safe and culturally appropriate food to lead active, healthy lives.

Jakarta, the capital of the Republic of Indonesia, was chosen as the venue for the Twenty-Eighth FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific to take place from the 15th to the 19th of May, 2006. This included a meeting of the Senior Officers till the 17th.

At the meeting, there were representatives from 29 Member Countries participating. Observers from 1 United Nations member state, 8 international non-governmental organizations and 3 intergovernmental organizations were also in attendance. Representatives of 6 other United Nations Organizations also participated.

The inaugural ceremony started with Mr. Biplab Nandi, Secretary of the twenty-eighth FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, greeting the delegates on behalf of the Conference Secretariat. This was followed by Mr. He Changchui, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative of FAO, and his Excellency, Dr Anton Apriyantono, Minister Of Agriculture, Government of the Republic Of Indonesia, presenting the opening addresses.

The delegates unanimously elected Dr Hasanuddin Ibrahim, Secretary General, Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture, as Chairperson of the Senior Officers Meeting. Delegates also elected all heads of delegations of Vice-Ministerial and Secretary of Agriculture rank as Vice-Chairpersons of the Senior Officers Meeting. Mr Zulkifly Idris, of Malaysia, was elected Rapporteur.

The Senior Officers meeting dealt with various issues such as Adjustment and Restructuring in Major Asian economies and their implications on Food Security and Poverty in the rest of the region and reducing vulnerability to natural disasters and promoting a livelihood approach

for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Issues such as the regional state of Food and Agriculture in the various states were also discussed. Other important issues brought up included Pesticide Management and its relationship to the Rotterdam, Stockholm and Basel Convention, Recent Developments in FAO's programme on Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADS), Bioenergy which is a development option for Agriculture and Forestry in Asia and the Pacific and there was also a post session technical presentation on Avian Influenza.

The statement of the Director-General dealt with views on topics such as the state of food insecurity in the world and in Asia and the Pacific, Results of Agricultural Development in Asia and the Pacific in 2004-05 which included food production, Fish and aquaculture production, report of the Forest sector, Agricultural commodity trade and the various constraints such as natural disasters and transboundary diseases and structural changes and decentralization.

The statement of the Secretary General also laid down the agenda of the regional conference. This included a number of key issues such as Adjustment and restructuring of major Asian economies and implications for Food Security and Poverty, Reducing Vulnerability to natural disasters and promoting a livelihood approach for rehabilitation and reconstruction, a report on FAO activities in the Region and the effects of International trade on Food Security and Poverty Alleviation. The main challenges such as the reform of the FAO were also discussed.

Meanwhile, Mr Biplab Halim, General Secretary of FIAN West Bengal, Executive Director of Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE) and the focal point of the International Planning Committee (IPC) in South Asia spoke about the dependence on imported food and how the increasing monopoly-control by Transnational Corporations and landlords is putting the food security and sovereignty of the people in great danger and also about the state of the Voluntary guidelines on the Right To Adequate Food. He felt that it is necessary for all governments to adopt the guidelines on right to adequate food with a view to giving them a place in their national constitutions which is the only way to guarantee access to productive resources like land through genuine Agrarian Reforms.

Also, it was noted that to end global hunger, the World Trade Organization (WTO) should be taken out of agriculture immediately. As an alternative, A World Convention on Food Sovereignty and Trade independent from the WTO was being called for as the convention will embody the people's demands including the abrogation of all WTO agreements related to Agriculture. It shall likewise have to ensure that trade in food and agricultural products will be subsumed to the realization of food sovereignty for all.

FIAN International Celebrates 20th Anniversary in September 2006

FIAN International is organizing an International Symposium on 13th September 2006, "With Human Rights against Hunger: Challenges in Times of Globalisation", in Heidelberg to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the organisation. Delegates from FIAN West Bengal will participate in the event. From 14th to 17th September, International Council Meeting of FIAN will also take place in Heidelberg Germany. A report of the delegates of FIAN West Bengal will be appeared in the next issue of E-newsletter

Obituary

Phularenu Guha, veteran political leader, freedom fighter and a very respected and senior member of FIAN West Bengal, passed away in her ashram in Bansdhoni, south of Kolkata, on Friday, July 28, 2006. She was 93. She was Union Minister of State for Social Welfare between 1967 and 1970. A prominent social activist involved with various organisations, she was a member of both Houses of Parliament. She was always engaged in movements for promotion of Human Rights in India and West Bengal. She will be particularly remembered for her great contribution in right to food movements in the country. Thousands of people including many members of FIAN West Bengal, human rights activists, social activists and others also paid their homage.



Shri Biren Maitra, noted human rights activists, freedom fighter and former Minister of West Bengal Government passed away on July 28, 2006 at Kolkata. He was 83. Shri Maitra was a prominent sympathizer of FIAN west Bengal and always took active initiative to promote the activities of the section. Shri Maitra was a person respected by all for his commitments and sacrifice to empower victims of violations of human rights and his sad demise is a great loss to FIAN West Bengal Section. A condolence meeting would be organised on August 12, 2006 at Kolkata

Shri Chinmoy Ghosh, eminent Environmentalist, Human Rights Activist and the leader of trade union movements, passed away on June 14, 2006. He was 73 years old. Shri Chinmoy Ghosh was a sympathiser of FIAN West Bengal for many years and supported all initiatives of the section to promote RTF in the state. He was well known for his trade union movement in Sonali Tea garden and he was particularly associated with the struggles of the victims of River Erosion in Maldah and Birbhum and he mobilised them to claim adequate rehabilitation facilities from the Government. Shri Ghosh was active even in his last days and he guided a FFM of FIAN International in Maldah last year.



Other News



Story 1

Farmers' win in court boosts morale

(Courtesy: India Together)

On 19 January this year, in a significant ruling, a different kind of court -- the District Consumers' Disputes Redressal Forum at Chamarajanagar, Karnataka -- said that farmers who pay 'water rate' fees are consumers and government dam authorities are service providers. As such, if dam authorities fail to release water, they may be held up for deficiency of service. This ruling comes from the efforts of two farmers Prabhu and Murthy in a small village -- Alur -- in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka, who dared to take the state machinery to task for not releasing water to their coconut and arecanut gardens.

The two farmers found that newly irrigated areas were receiving water whereas their old gardens and lands were being dried out. Also, the dam had received enough water to supply them and yet, water was not being released. They took the state government to court for not giving them water for the past three-four years. The twist is that they approached a district consumer court, and won the case in less than a year.

Story 2

AGRICULTURE/ FARMERS

Farmers' suicide in Maharashtra
(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Mumbai: Four farmers have committed suicide in different parts of Maharashtra, unable to shoulder the burden of debt. This statement is made by the local police. In Akola and Washim districts, one farmer each had taken the extreme step due to rising debts, while two farmers committed suicide in separate cases in Beed district of Marathwada region. Anand Golait a marginal farmer of Tankhed village in Akola district committed suicide by jumping before a speeding train. In another incident Vijay Jadhav, a debt-ridden farmer from Bhendimahala village in Washim district ended his life by consuming poison, police said. Triambak Bhausaheb Galgatte, a resident of Nimgaon Chauba of Beed district, also committed suicide. In Kalsamber Wadgaon, Nanabhau Ranoji Karande committed suicide. Both farmers in Beed district had taken loans from private moneylenders, police

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