



FIAN-WEST BENGAL E-NEWS LETTER



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Dandi Update

Kolkata People's Convention Commemorated Com. Abdul Halim's 104th Birthday on 6th December, 2005 to Protest Against WTO Agreement on Agriculture

On the eve of 6th Ministerial Conference of WTO in Hong Kong, roughly ten thousand people gathered on 6th Dec. 2005 at the historic Centenary hall of Calcutta University comprising peasants, workers, human rights activists, social activists, representatives of various political parties, civil society actors, singers and sections of intelligentsia and distinguished guests from Philippines, Belgium, Germany and France to register their protest against WTO.

People from several districts of West Bengal and neighbouring states like Orissa and Jharkhand participated in the Convention. They formed two big rallies and traversed the streets of Kolkata shouting slogans and demonstrating against WTO AOA demanding ouster of WTO from agriculture and finally culminated at the Centenary Hall.

Noted historian Amalendu Dey presided over the convention and Com. Biplab Halim raised the voice of protest against WTO in his inaugural address explaining the neo-liberal atrocities on the developing world. He elicited how the imperialists are striving to swallow the livelihood, culture and sovereignty of the third world people in collusion. Eminent speakers from various organizations and schools of thought expressed their resentment and demanded the Indian Government to take rigid steps to thwart the neo – liberal aspirations. It is noteworthy that large number of peasant women had participated in the convention and strongly demanded WTO out of agriculture. The Convention ultimately proclaimed a Declaration which oppose this imperialist exercise of exploitation encroaching on the new areas of agriculture, industry, water and biodiversity and unequivocally demand the assertion of people's food sovereignty and land rights, which can only be possible if WTO is out of agriculture. IMSE was the main host and FIAN West Bengal was one of the co-host of the conference. FIAN members enthusiastically took part in the demonstrations and participated in the conference.



The Outcome of the WTO Ministerial, Hong Kong

Reactions from different Organisations

Amidst large-scale protests of the activists from different countries, who gathered in Hong Kong to observe the WTO process and to highlight concerns of commons around the world, the sixth WTO Ministerial ended in Hong Kong and the outcome is nothing but disappointing. The NGOs and social activist groups dealing with the development, human rights, environment, labour rights are of opinion that the sixth WTO Ministerial Conference (Hong Kong) was a failure in contrast to the statements by Governments who considered it as a success. One key focus of this meeting was AOA. The outcome suggests that developing countries will have very few significant gains particularly in the field of agriculture. In the negotiation ground, India refused to move from its position on the agricultural issues insisting upon an end date for removal of farm subsidies by the developed countries.

Member countries agreed upon a draft Least Developed Countries (LDC) package allowing them duty free quota free market access, though trade analysis saw it as a watered down offer.

The offer to the LDCs is far below expectations as it is being watered down to a product coverage of 97% instead of the initial demand of bound duty free and quota free access to developed countries on all products for all LDCs. This allows developed countries to continue to protect "sensitive products" that are of export advantage for LDCs such as textiles and clothing from Bangladesh and rice from Cambodia. Meanwhile there is no gain in the many other Special and Differential treatment proposals.



Trade analysis, slammed the rich nations for developing what they termed as "constructive ambiguities" to really make even that reduced LDC package ineffective and non – operational as it falls short of containing measures for an economy to enhance productive capacity and improve upon the livelihood of the poor.

On the issue of trade in environmental goods and services, India has opposed the "list approach" for seeking tariff reduction on environmental goods as it is not beneficial for developing countries. The "list approach" focuses only on goods and is, in fact, seen as a back door method to bring in NAMA. India has submitted an alternative approach called "environmental project approach" proposing that all environmental goods and services in the project should have tariff concessions. According to the Third World Network, there is little to celebrate from Hong Kong. The agreement to eliminate export subsidies by 2013 is not enough, as these should have been eliminated long ago and at least an end date of latest 2010 should have been adopted. But the proposals to open markets in farming and natural-resource sectors (including forests, fisheries and minerals) will benefit large corporations but have devastating impact on the poor who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods, food and medicines.

The worst deal is in services and non-agricultural market access (NAMA). The services text, which did not receive consensus in Geneva and hotly contested in Hong Kong, has steered the modalities of GATS toward the direction demanded by the EU and other developed countries. The counter services proposal by more than 100 developing countries has not been reflected in the Ministerial Declaration and as a result they will be subject to pressure to liberalize in 19 broad-ranging service sectors.

'Focus on the Global South' said that in agreeing to slash tariffs in their agricultural, services and industrial markets, developing countries sanction of the text is a failure for development and a victory for corporate globalisation.

Oxfam International condemned the text as unacceptable and reflecting rich countries' interests. It is a *"betrayal of development promises. Small progress on some aspects of agriculture is more*



than cancelled out by extremely damaging proposals on services and industry. Developing countries were put in an impossible position: either accepts a text which is seriously flawed or be blamed for the failure of the round."

Oxfam said that the right for poor countries to protect basic services and emerging industries has been comprehensively undermined, with grave prospects for development.

ActionAid said the outcome was an affront to the world's poor. The poorer countries were bullied into agreeing. On elimination of export subsidy, ActionAid said, "poor people can't wait another eight years for an end to EU export subsidies and minority interests are put before the needs of the majority of the world's population". On export subsidies, Tim Rice of Action Aid UK said not only is the 2013 end-date is too late but the EU had already committed to reducing them anyway. "By 2013 these cuts will only amount to one billion euros, which pales into insignificance compared to the 55 billion euros the EU gives in domestic subsidies every year. Millions of farmers in poor countries will continue to lose their livelihoods because of these unfair handouts." Greenpeace is concerned that NAMA deal will push increasing liberalization in sectors such as electronic goods, fisheries and forests, which will inevitably result in negative social and environmental goods - more discarded electronic goods will be dumped on developing countries, more trees will be destroyed in the world's forests and even more fish will be pillaged from the oceans.

Mr.Biplab Halim, General Secretary of FIAN West Bengal was also present in Hong kong to share with others the fate of millions of poor people in India who suffered hunger and starvation due to policies adopted in negotiations like WTO. FIAN West Bengal feels that the WTO has failed to adequately address demands by developing countries to prevent legitimization of an assault on their resources for the benefit of developed country/corporations. The process once again reveals that no credible solution is possible through WTO negotiations and the interests of poor countries would never be taken into consideration in such a process adequately. The resistance of poor countries would be defeated by the pressure from the developed world in such negotiations and the empty and cynical "development package" would be imposed on the poor countries by the developed nations. These policies would intensify alienation of livelihood resources of poor and would worsen the scenario of hunger and malnutrition in the world. It is an irony that majority of the developed countries who advocated for such policies in WTO negotiations, which invariably ruin the food sovereignty of millions, have also taken center stage in issuing prescriptions for ending hunger world-wide through several programmes/policies. Thus the time has come to realize how the global economic interests shape the food sovereignty of poor today. and to question the sincerity of the big nations in fulfilling their promises for eradicating poverty and hunger and The realization of right to food in poor countries thus depends largely on the awareness of civil society actors and on their everyday

struggles to achieve their rights. The institutions like WTO hindering the struggles of poor in achieving their right to food and increasing livelihood threats for vulnerable groups should be further condemned.

National Symposium of FIAN India in Delhi

A National symposium on right to food was held in IIPA, Delhi in joint collaboration of FIAN India and FIAN International. Participants from different parts of India presented case studies on violation of right to food in India. This symposium was a follow-up of TOT organised by FIAN West Bengal and FIAN Tamilnadu in Kolkata and Chennai respectively. The main intension of this National Symposium was to develop a common consensus for further future follow up with CSOs and NGOS from different federal states of the country, so that the cases of violations could be documented in a systematic way and could be incorporated in the Country Report on Right to Food which FIAN India proposes to publish shortly. Some of the important cases presented by the participants were violation of right to food of indigenous people and Dalits in U.P, eviction of tribal of Kashipur, Orissa, food security issues of slum dwellers of Bhubaneshwar, impact of shrimp industries on agricultural lands in Tamilnadu and failure of the PDS and EGS in different parts of India. Participant from FIAN West Bengal Ms. Parama Ukil presented a case study on the right to food violation of the Munda population in Kolkata.



Different methodologies of case documentations were discussed in the symposium. There were also discussions on various thematic areas to be covered in the Country Report on Right to Food. The participants further came up with a concrete plan of action as a part of follow-up strategies for future activities. The symposium was very successful in providing a platform to CSOs and NGOs from all over the country for sharing experiences related to their struggles for realisation of right to food in India. The symposium strengthened the bond between the participants, who represented several well known social organisations, to work together for mainstreaming RTF and for realisation of a future without hunger and starvation deaths in India.

News from FIAN West Bengal

VISIT OF SOUTH ASIA PARTNERSHIP BANGLADESH

South Asia Partnership (SAP) Bangladesh is a Non – Governmental Organization devoted to promote the socio – economic conditions of the poorer section of the community in Bangladesh since its inception in 1984. The organization is a part of the SAP system, which refers to SAP International and its member organizations in South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and Canada. SAP is one of the key actors in the NGO development efforts in Bangladesh, working to build up the capacity of small and mid level NGOs and promote rural development in Bangladesh. A team comprising representatives of SAP Bangladesh and some other NGOs of rural Bangladesh came to India to enrich their experiences related to the human rights issues. A one day human rights training workshop was organized by FIAN West Bengal for the SAP team members.

Different socio cultural aspects of human rights were discussed during this workshop and special emphasis was given on the present Right to Food situation of India and Bangladesh. Different case studies on right to food was presented with the help of slide shows and a film of FIAN. was also shown to them to give them an overview of the present situation. Participants were engaged in interesting and meaningful interactions. This workshop deepened the SAP team's understandings of members on Right to food and related human rights



issues in India and created opportunities for sharing knowledge and experiences across the border. It was also a learning process for FIAN West Bengal members, who were present in the workshop as they could enrich their knowledge on common regional concerns related to food security in South Asia. FIAN West Bengal organises such workshops on human rights on a regular basis and feels the need to organise such workshops more in number in coming days and months in order to facilitate realisation of basic human rights in this subcontinent. Similar kind of workshops are always needed in future and FIAN West Bengal is always ready to co operate and organize this kind of workshops for interesting interaction.

Malda Eviction

More than 300 families of the village Panchanandapur are facing the threat of eviction and loss of livelihood opportunities as the recurring flood and erosion of the Ganga sweeps away the Birohi Block of Malda District in West Bengal. The natural disaster has endangered the right to food of as many as 50,000 people who were otherwise engaged in agriculture as marginal peasants and labourers. The structural preventive measures so far undertaken has gone in vain. The frequent slumping of fertile agricultural and settled lands along with unplanned governmental land acquisition for constructing marginal embankments and spurs has alienated the villagers at Pagla Ghat, Panchanandapur from their right to immovable belong

The most visible impact of this natural disaster has been on the livelihood of the victim groups.



Facing threat to livelihood, the victims have been dragged to the threshold of absolute pauperization. The only option left with them is that to work as daily labourers which is even uncertain. Continual blasting in the nearby Rajmahal Hills has resulted in siltation and drying up of rivers, crop damage, arsenic contamination and seismic hypertension. The villagers have been grossly deprived of their right to information and participation.

They are largely unaware of the

policy decisions that is being implemented or are likely to be implemented in the near future. Their vulnerabilities have been politicized. More than 300 families have been displaced in the village. The survival of these families is at stake as 98 per cent of them are engaged in the agricultural sector. There has been no gesture from the government till date either to rehabilitate the displaced or find them alternative sources of income to feed themselves. The relief operations has fell woefully inadequate and unevenly distributed.

The FFM which was organized by FIAN West Bengal Section in collaboration with FIAN IS tried to find out the status of food security of the villagers affected by river erosion and flood in Panchanandapur. The FFM focused on the issues of displacement/eviction, relief, rehabilitation and the impact of the same in terms of food security. It further focused on the role of the faulty environmental planning of the state which causes destruction of productive resources of commons leading to hunger and malnutrition in Malda. The FFM team tried to evaluate the role of the state in protecting and promoting the right to food of the victims in Panchanandapur.

Fact Finding Mission Organised

Just before United Nations Human Rights Day on December 10, 2005, the International Human Rights organisation FIAN (Food First Information and Action Network) conducted a FFM to investigate on the Right to food (RTF) situation in the areas of Malda West Bengal, Dandi, Orissa and Howrah, West Bengal. FIAN works for the realisation of RTF world-wide, especially for the marginalised sections of the society, as small farmers' fishers and backward classes. From December 1-9, FIAN West Bengal and FIAN International jointly organised a FFM in order to document and verify the Human RTF situation in selected cases: River Erosion in Malda, land Rights in Dandi, problems in Howrah Foundry sector. The FFM team consisted of representatives from FIAN IS and from FIAN chapters of France, Belgium, Delhi, AP and WB. The members went to the spot and interviewed the affected people authorities and social workers to get a clear picture of the human RTF situation.



In Malda every monsoon, river Ganga erodes large portions of the river bank leaving thousands of poor people without livelihoods. The team investigated into relief and rehabilitation measures finding out that they were almost non-existing. Some of the people have been suffering from the erosion since 1960s and had to shift up to 15 times. Victims have to live under shelters in very bad condition; they were confronted to hunger and malnutrition. No adequate help has been provided to them, there is no permanent decent settlement for them, and a number of

them are facing erosion again.

In Dandi island the field visit revealed that 157 families of Subarnapur village are living in deep poverty. They have no access to safe drinking water and other basic amenities including benefits of food security programmes of the state, as the village itself is not recognised by the government. The people have no land rights, and there is a stunning lack of clarity on the statute of the land. The future of these people, who are primarily fishers, is at stake. They are constantly harassed by the forest guards and haunted by the threat of eviction. Allegedly a tourism project or salt industries could cause authorities to drive them away, but there is no rehabilitation or compensation foreseen for the villagers. The Government is indifferent to the basic rights including RTF and feed oneself of the poor fishers living in Dandi island.

The team finally visited the foundry sector of Howrah, close to Kolkata. They investigated into the severe working conditions of the foundry's labour force. Authorities are unable to enforce minimum wages, and the number of the workers does not get the social schemes and benefits provided by the government. The permanent job insecurity is a considerable threat to the livelihood of the workers. The foundry industry has turned into a sick industry and the state fails to address the situation adequately.

FIAN's team will draft a report summarising the conclusions and recommendations to be drawn from these field analysis. The report will be used as an advocacy tool at the United Nations and National level.

Policy Watch

The Millennium Development Goals: How far is it Implemented?

The Millennium Development Goals derived from U.N. Millennium Declaration adopted by all member nations of the UN aimed at reducing world's poverty and ensuring basic human rights standards for all. MDGs are a set of measurable and time bound goals with 18 targets and 48 indicators.

- Goal 1: Eradicate poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal Declaration
- Goal 3: Gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal mortality
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Global development partnership



These goals have brought new hopes for billions living in utter poverty across the world. India has also agreed to implement these goals within 2015. Moreover India has own national commitments in the form of NDG and CMP of UPA government. FIAN West Bengal is working towards empowering victims of violations of right to food (RTF) through last few decades. FIAN West Bengal aims at facilitating progressive realisation of RTF in India and the MDG, NDG and UPA targets are therefore very relevant for FIAN West Bengal's work. Despite the fact that these goals give birth to new hopes among poor in the country, the question as to how far these promises would be materialised, haunts the people at grassroots. In this backdrop FIAN West Bengal is joining hands along with State Social Watch Process in West Bengal, National Social Watch India and Wada Na Todo Abhyan in an attempt to analyse the problem regarding implementation of tall promises so far, for eradication of poverty and hunger. Social watch India is a campaign of MDG which tries to facilitate the democratisation of knowledge and to promote inclusive democracy through social vigilance and monitoring as well as through documenting performances of key institutions of governance in India at central and state levels. Wada Na Todo is another campaign which "strives to undertake a reality check, for the commitments made by our government to bring a change into the lives of people –for the better" FIAN West Bengal is member of both of these campaigns at State and national levels. Though these campaigns focus on various aspects of human rights, FIAN West Bengal continues its focus on RTF and Right to Water and has contributed to these campaigns on these issues. FIAN West Bengal's observations regarding implementation of these goals reveal harsh realities which indicates that the above targets would be very difficult to achieve..

The current United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government in India is making lofty claims to have taken a historic step to help alleviate poverty. There are various schemes and mechanisms for generation of employment but their implementation is really questionable. The commitments made by the UPA Government are supposed to be officially monitored by the National Advisory Committee (NAC), consisting civil society group activists, reputed academics and sociologists. They certainly look quite encouraging but what are the achievements in real terms? According to Government estimation in 1993-94 the proportion of people below the poverty line stood at around 37 percent and this was brought down to 27 percent by 1999-2000. But at the same time calorie intake information for the year 1993-94 collected by National Sample Survey (NSS) showed that nearly 70 percent of the rural population was in the poverty bracket. Moreover, the frequent starvation deaths in different parts of the country and farmers' suicides and increasing agriculture labourers' migration to urban areas indicate severe crisis in rural areas. The official estimating mechanisms to list poverty figures do not encompass the various dimensions of the problem. It can be mentioned in this context that nearly half of the Indian population is in poverty despite the promising figures put out by official agencies.

The current drinking water situation in India is also appalling.. Inadequate access to water and sanitation is a major problem of the country. Water has been commodified and treated as a tradable economic good or a cashable resource. Different private agencies and MNCs are utilising the resource for industrial purpose, engineering and infrastructure consortiums and there is tendency to cut down on non- revenue water, which is a crucial source for the urban poor. Water availability is a fundamental Human Right. But the dice of water availability is loaded heavily against the poor. Water privatisation and unregulated market for drinking water points to the falling of the water infrastructure in many parts of India. The long term planning for urban drinking water should cover all concerns of safe disposal of liquid and solid wastes. A greater allocation for water in the budgets is required for this purpose. The MDG targets 70.5% of habitations should have access to safe drinking water. The Government has claimed recently that 98% of the rural population has been covered with this provision. But the quality, reliability and sustainability of water services should have a better assessment.

Through our experiences we have seen that no development target is ever reached in absence of awareness of people and continuous monitoring by the civil society. MDG will also be no exception. Goal 1 i.e. Eradicate Poverty and Hunger, is a big challenge in a country like India and calls for addressing structural inequalities which exist in Indian society. Moreover, eradication of hunger and poverty in India will require careful handling of the challenges of globalisation. Creating an enabling environment in which the commons would have access to knowledge and decision making is central to ensure the full realisation of MDG and this would require adoption of a rights based approach in development policy and implementations.

Through Social watch and Wada Na Todo campaign FIAN West Bengal is taking active part in state/country level review and monitoring of MDG from people's perspective.

In West Bengal a big point of concern is deterioration of agrarian economy and helplessness of peasants who are not provided with any alternative livelihood opportunities for survival. Instead of taking measures to increase the agricultural productivity, developing the rural infrastructure and irrigation system and ensuring security in land holding; the state government is promoting large scale corporatisation of agriculture and conversion of agricultural land for industrial purposes, thereby ruining the livelihoods of millions of rural poor. FIAN West Bengal believes that only by protecting the right of the farmers and by implementing genuine

agrarian reform measures the Goal 1 of MDG i.e. eradication of poverty and hunger could be achieved for the majority of people in West Bengal. National and state level strategies for the MDGs must include a commitment to women's right to work, education, health services, property ownership, decision making and participation. To ensure food security, better governance is also a crucial factor. Therefore FIAN West Bengal tries to ensure the participation of grassroots actors of the state in governance at all levels, thereby increasing accountability of the state and enhancing process and quality of governance leading to social equity and justice. Awareness generation is a major part of the campaign for the reduction of mass poverty, sustainable economic growth and social change. FIAN West Bengal is also engaged in advocacy and lobby work at state level to ensure implementation of MDG and other similar promises. Social Watch and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan provide opportunities to FIAN West Bengal to work with different like minded organisations at state/national level to advance MDG policy prescription and highlight the priority needs of the region.

In the Next Issue

- Report of FFM
- Mining & Eviction Threats in Hazaribagh
- Election Watch in West Bengal
- Implementation of Mid Day Meal in West Bengal

New Development in Dandi after the FFM

We regret to inform you that the situations of the victims in Dandi island in Orissa, who are facing threats of evictions, have deteriorated further since August 2005. In December 2005, FIAN International organized an International Fact Finding Mission (FFM) visit in the area to investigate the case. In this connection the team also met the District Magistrate and other officers at Baleshwar. Soon after the completion of the FFM, the state/district authorities have expedited their measures to evict the villagers from the island and have termed them as criminals and illegal settlers from Bangladesh. It is needless to mention here that both the acquisitions are baseless as the villagers are peaceful and law abiding citizens of India with valid voter identity cards of the country. The preparation of eviction is suddenly geared up as the local vested groups are annoyed with international interventions. The local victims are beaten up and threatened by the local influential leaders and their appointed mafias. The state is trying to disown these 153 poor households who are living in this island for more than last 25 years. The lack of clarity on the category of the island (whether comes under Revenue or Forest department) has added extra dimension to the problem. The threat of forced eviction is further intensified. FIAN west Bengal is closely monitoring the development in Dandi and in case of further deterioration of the situation an international protest campaign would be launched.

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Please Note: Due to unavoidable reasons we could not include the articles on Agrarian reform and Eviction of slums at Kolkata in this issue. These articles will be included in forthcoming issue in March/April

