

FIAN WEST BENGAL E-NEWS LETTER



E-newsletter of
January 2008
Issue IX



Editorial

Dear Friends,

Year 2007 was marked with brutal violations of right to food in West Bengal. The incidents of Singur and Nandigram shocked the world. Thousands of peasants in both these places lost their livelihoods and started suffering from chronic starvation. Three peasants committed suicide in Singur in post eviction phase while in Nandigram more than 200 peasants died in last year in police firing and attacks of the goons of ruling party during resisting land acquisition for a SEZ. Severe apprehension of Civil Society and large-scale mass resistances in Nandigram forced the state government to abandon the land acquisition plan in the area. However, in Singur the construction for TATA car plant is progressing steadily.

Kolkata High Court played an important role in shaping the future of the victims of violation of RTF both in Singur and Nandigram. While in Nandigram the Court Verdict boosted the morale of the mass movement, in the case of Singur the situation was just reverse. The high Court condemned Nandigram Killing and termed the role of the state as 'unconstitutional'. The court ordered a thorough enquiry (to be done by CBI) in Nandigram and asked the government to pay compensation to the families of deceased, injured and victims of gender violence.

The significance of Singur & Nandigram incidents could be seen in emerging a strong grassroots Civil society movement in West Bengal. This movement has been able to mobilise support of larger civil society both at national and international level. We strongly feel that the strength of future human rights movements in the country will largely depend on the emergence of such grassroots movements across the nation. Thus Singur & Nandigram have brought new hopes to all of us who are working for promotion of human rights in general and Right to food for all in particular.

We know that the Tatas are launching the car in joint collaboration with FIAT. Thus it is an Extra Territorial obligation of the Italian Government to look into the situation and protect the right to food and livelihood of the people in Singur as it comes under human rights obligations. We should build public opinion to raise these issues and seek your solidarity and cooperation in the future.

List of Contents

Independent FFM
on Nandigram

Celebration of Anti
Poverty Day

News on RTI

Food Riots in West
Bengal

North South
Consultation on
Shrimp
Aquaculture

Independent Fact Finding Mission on Nandigram, West Bengal, India

A few concerned national and international human rights organizations and individuals have organized an Independent Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) on recent Nandigram conflict. where members of FIAN West Bengal (Ms. Saswati Bhattacharya and Ms. Debayani Basu) also participated. The main objective of this FFM was to find out the human rights status of the people in Nandigram and to verify whether any violation of rights have taken place, endangering the livelihoods of the villagers over there.

This Independent Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) comprises participants from United States, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines and other states of India.

A Report on the Celebration of Anti-Poverty Day, 2007

On the eve of the Autumn Festival, FIAN West Bengal along with IMSE, Forum of Voluntary Organizations and a few other like minded organizations observed the Anti-Poverty Day on 16th of October 2007 (in lieu of 17th October) at Mahabodhi society Hall, Kolkata. Three years ago the programme was first initiated by the Wada Na Todo Abhiyan and its partners. This time they also called for a global protest against poverty with the slogan **STAND UP AND SPEAK OUT**. Simultaneously the World Food Day (16th October), whose theme for this year was food and food security was also celebrated and the stalemate regarding Agreement of Agriculture (AOA) of WTO was also discussed during the same occasion.



Points were raised regarding the structural problem of poverty eradication programme. Poverty can only be eliminated by adopting structural measures. Government has introduced many schemes in this respect like the NREGS, PDS and the Antodyaya Yojna etc. But unless and until people have the access to food producing resources it is very difficult to fight against poverty. Access to food producing resources is one of the most important measures of the structural remedies.

The rights based approach towards eradicating poverty envisages structural remedies to the structural problem of poverty. We feel that time has come when we should concentrate on enabling people with more rights accrual through land reform and agrarian reform programs. Land reform as a part o agrarian reform should be the main focus. According to the Resolution taken in course of the meeting, full accomplishment of the government's present land reform policies should be the only omnipotent measure to eradicate hunger and poverty. The important role of human rights in eradicating hunger and poverty by developing a sustainable alternative is the focus of this celebration.

The participants observed a token STAND UP for two minutes in order to show their protest against poverty as part of the world wide STAND UP AND SPEAK OUT campaign. Professor Sunanda Sanyal, Shri Debobroto Bandhyopadhyay (President of FIAN West Bengal), Dr. Ujjaini Halim (coordinator of FIAN WB), Shri Biplab Halim (Executive Director of IMSE), and others reflected their opinions on what should be the right step at this moment to obliterate hunger and poverty from the country, They also focused on the recent privatization policies of the government where big industrialists will be trying to capture the small industries which imply that in the long run it will

destroy the livelihood security of the poor people. Gradually this will break the society into two sections where the rich will enjoy all the fruits of the development and the poor and the weaker section of the society will become poorer.

During the course of discussion the participants demanded the settlement of Agreement of Agriculture (AOA) in favour of developing countries and the restriction of subsidies in developing countries. They also demanded the reduction of price of the fertilizers and pesticides and protest was also raised against dumping. The stalemate in AoA negotiation is the result of the rigid neo liberal policies pursued by the rich countries. It is a question of great concern that India should do everything to safeguard the interest of the millions of poor living in the underdeveloped countries and civil society has to make its presence felt during the course of this negotiation.



The convention focused as a whole on the complimentary roles of different Human Rights to achieve poverty eradication and stressed the need to actively engage in opposing neo-liberalism.

News on RTI

The Central Information Commission (CIC) and state commissions have sought more powers, including initiation of contempt proceedings against public authorities for not executing their orders, by amending the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The CIC has submitted a list of recommendations to the Centre and has mentioned that Specific provisions may be recommended to be included in the RTI Act itself for dealing with contempt proceedings. The recommendations also included that the power of contempt should be given to the Information Commissions (ICs) so as to implement their orders. The 12-page recommendations also suggested that information commissions be given the powers of a civil court for proper implementation of their orders. The powers of civil court have been given only for limited purposes. These do not cover powers concerning execution of decrees and recovery of fine etc Minister of State for Personnel and Public Grievances Suresh Pachouri has assured the CIC and state information commissioners that the Centre would consider the recommendations and also stressed that the UPA government was committed to implement the Act in its "letter and spirit". (Courtesy PTI)

Food Riots in West Bengal

The ration shops West Bengal, were being attacked by the public in protest against the corrupt dealers. The protest has spread across many districts of the state. Initial protests broke out on September 16 in Bankura district of West Bengal. The food grains and sugar that has to be served to the poor in a subsidized rate now are being diverted in the market and are sold at higher prices by the ration dealers. Thousands of angry people pounced over the ration shops in protest against this malpractice. Police firing took away the lives of the two protestors. Again on the 26th of October another revolt broke out at Swarupnagar in north 24 parganas. After hearing these events the government cancelled the licences of 55 dealers among the 20,372 ration dealers of the state. Meanwhile, about 1,200 ration dealers in Bankura and many dealers in Birbhum and Burdwan have returned their licences to district authorities. A report says that in West Bengal Rs 1,913.76 crore of subsidized food grain was stolen in this way since last year. A senior Food Department official said that the Government infrastructure is not strong enough to handle the enormous demand which has increased on account of post-monsoon floods and damage of crops and that the Government has to depend on the to ensure a smooth supply of the subsidized rate food grains to the poor. The opposition groups raised their demand for having a thorough investigation against this corrupted PDS system of West Bengal.

North – South Consultation on Shrimp Aquaculture

FIAN West Bengal participated in the North –South Consultation on Shrimp Aquaculture and its impact on the livelihood security of the farmers at a conference organized by WALHI in cooperation with ASIA at Lampung, Indonesia from 3rd September to 6th September 2007. 30 delegates from 20 countries took part in the meeting. There were representatives of MAP from America, Red Manglar from Latin America, FPP (Forest Peoples Programme) from England, Friends of the Earth from Malaysia, Swedish Swallows from Sweden, BELLA from Bangladesh and representatives from Africa, Philippines, as well as local shrimp farmers of Indonesia and representatives of some like minded organizations like JALA and KIARA. All the participants shared their views and opinions regarding the “Certification Scheme” and discuss modalities to develop and implement an effective campaign in consumer countries targeting consumers, retailers and other relevant players in the shrimp chain of custody. On the 4th of September, WALHI organized a field-trip to a marginal shrimp-farming community at **Dipasena**, where a Shrimp mega-farm had been planned. However CP, the Thai multinational that has bought Dipasena, withdrew permission at the last moment. It was to be expected – this was by far, the largest and most diverse international gathering of pro-farmer organizations that had ever met in Lampung! Nevertheless, the day was salvaged – an informal interactive session with the farmers, who work at the Dipasena farms, was organized. The session brought to light the general despair in the community – uncertainty about jobs, wages and the future. After the session, the delegates planted mangrove saplings at the site of a reclaimed aquaculture farm.

On the final day of the meeting a general conclusion on Certification of Shrimp had been drafted as **Lampung Declaration** with the consent of all the participants where it was clearly defined that what should be the focus at the consumer campaign. All the participants agree to concentrate on farmed aquaculture with a focus on farmed tropical shrimp and also to form a Global Alliance. The meeting ended with a Musical Festival and a dinner party organized by WALHI followed by a Token Gift for each of the participants. WALHI, ASIA and other partner organizations decided to organize the next meeting in Europe in 2008.

FIAN West Bengal

C/o IMSE

195 Jodhpur Park, Kolkata 700068, India

Tel: 00913324128426

Fax: 00913324725571

E-mail: fianwestbengal@vsnl.net

Website : www.fianwb.org