

Her own piece of earth...



Demands for land, livelihood and dignity by marginalised women from across India....

act:onaid

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Foreword



As the world's largest democratic exercise, the Indian general election 2009, unfolded, a non-party mobilisation of women hailing from poor and marginalised communities shared and voiced issue that most mainstream political parties had missed.

Her own piece of earth...

In a year that witnessed an unprecedented increase in basic food prices and a global financial meltdown, the issue of hunger and food-security for the marginalised missed the list of promises by those seeking a fresh mandate to form a government.

This is disconcerting for hundreds of community organisations and platforms that are struggling against denial of rights, poverty and destruction of livelihood through taking away of peoples' resources.

As party candidates returned to millions of voters, our partners reached out to women from tribal, fishing, Muslim and Dalit communities, besides single and positive women, to re-enforce the needs of the poor.

This process started with the deepening of financial crisis across the globe and our understanding that the neo-liberal policy, marked by privatisation of peoples' resources and withdrawal of state from basic services, is having a dilapidating impact on the poor.

A national process was initiated to create platforms in all four zones of India to forge a mandate of core issues based on what millions in India felt that needed to be addressed by our elected representatives.

This zonal process created massive energy among community organisations and groups engaged in rights based work to go back to the poor in each state, district and village to create a common set of demands.

As this process unfolded, the livelihood rights of women acquired an increasingly prominent focus.

Ownership of resources emerged as the singular demand with regional variations characteristic of India's multiple social, economic and regional realities.

This process resulted in women's conclave across India, involving over 12 states, to pitch the unequivocal demand for land, livelihood and dignity.

From Simla in the Himalayas to Bangalore in south, from Jaipur in the western desert to Guwahati in the northeast, women spoke on what was missing from the election manifestos.

They did this in presence of representatives from political parties, where they were brave enough to turn-up.

The women not only spoke on what was denied to them by the way of land, property and livelihood, but also spoke on how inadequate basic services are and the impact commercialisation of resources was having on them.

The testimonies that emerged from these pre-election conclaves reflect the critical role that ownership of land and livelihood resources play in fighting patriarchy and poverty.

Coastal women spoke about the impact of taking away of their customary rights, while tribal women narrated how taking away of forest land has turned them into migrants searching for food and shelter.

The conclaves also threw up scathing criticism of the political apathy that the party manifestos have displayed towards demands of the poor.

The women leaders who took the stage during the conclaves amply displayed an intent to take-up political processes leading towards representation in Parliament. These women also clearly displayed an understanding of vote bank politics that most candidates resort to by promising gifts and cheap rice.

The stories and testimonies showcased here are a potent voice of rights-based change and the demand for land and ownership of livelihood resources.

Many of the women have already registered success in getting these core demands realised and are on the threshold of taking it a to wider community, both regionally and nationally...

Bobu Mathew

Country Director, ActionAid India
June 2009, India



Image : Parvinder/ActionAid

**We want land,
not promises of charity**

*"We will make candidates
sign on a paper
affirming the demands
that we have for land
and livelihood."*

"Give us land and we will take the rest," says 45-year-old Vijaya, who leads a Dalit women's movement for land, suming up the core demand of the marginalised women who came together on a regional platform for a two-day conclave in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, ahead of India's general election.

"The elections will come and go but the struggle for land will go on," she adds. Vijaya is part of a marginalised women's movement that is active through different initiatives in three states in south of India.

My land and my food

"Government displaced my family. We were left without livelihood after being driven away from our forest. This forced us to become daily wage workers in brick kilns and rice mills," says Rani from a federation of tribal people fighting for recognition of their rights as indigenous people.

Women from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry spoke of the distress that the government is causing by taking away forest, agricultural and coastal land for privatisation. These women feel that the ongoing economic policies are taking away their food and customary rights.

"Coastal Zone Management will cut us away from the sea. It is our life and the coast is our customary right. If it is taken away from us we will perish," asserts Samundeeswari, who is a part of the National Coastal Women's Movement.

"Private companies have set-up air-conditioned shops to lure customers. Fisher women who have traditionally sold the catch in the local markets cannot compete with them," adds Eversta from coastal state of Kerala.

Rejecting token offers

"Promises of televisions and cheap rice in return for votes are not going to put food on our plate. We know this very well. Let the politicians come to us, we have more questions," says Saroja from a tribal community.

While the political parties have been making populist announcements, as the conclave was held earlier this month, some these women groups decided to question and fix accountability for the promises the candidates make during the elections.

"We will make the candidates sign on a paper affirming the demands that we have for land and livelihood. If they get elected, we will chase them for fulfilling these promises," added 29-year-old women Vanaja, who has been working on the issue of land for the past four years.



Power for the poor

Many among the five hundred women who gathered for the conclave felt that an absence of their issues was an indication for them to enter electoral politics. Some of these women have been contesting village council elections and felt the time had come for taking the first steps towards parliament.

"Women should participate in active politics. We struggled for over six months to get representation in the panchayat in Ottapidaram in Tuticorin District. I am proud that not only did I manage to file my nomination but also won the election," says Subbamma, a Dalit woman from Meetchi Peoples' Movement.

Echoing the sentiment of claiming political power to enable the community to wrest its rights and allowing women to become owners of land and property, Vanaja, a 29-year-old women from Vellupuram, says: "We want the community people to get power as that is the only thing that will take the issues of marginalised people forward."

Reeling under "development"

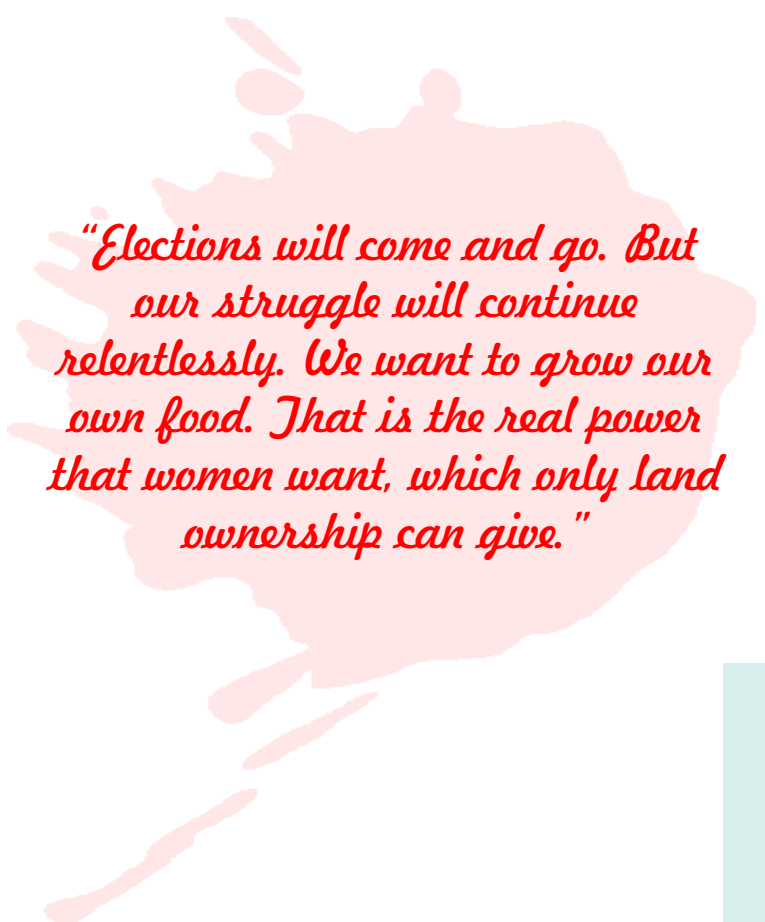
A common theme that wove together the issues of marginalised in the conclave was of displacement and snatching away of community resources in the name of development through mega projects and Special Economic Zones.

"Countless people have been pushed into poverty because of eviction. They have been uprooted from their livelihood. From people in slums to fisherfolk on the coast, from tribal community in the forests to farmers in fertile plains, all have been impacted adversely by this so called development," says Nicholas, who leads Dalit Mannurimai Koottamippu's (DMK's) work.

"The tribes need forest, fisherfolk need access to sea, Dalit women need land and all poor people need their homestead rights," says Magalene from fisher women alliance.



Image : Parvinder/ActionAid



"Elections will come and go. But our struggle will continue relentlessly. We want to grow our own food. That is the real power that women want, which only land ownership can give."

Paddy fields, not flower gardens

A veteran of land struggle in Tamil Nadu, 52-year-old Vijaya is well aware of the power that a women growing her own food has. For 20 years she has been part of a movement to get Dalit women land ownership of unused government land.

"We do not want free houses, where poor are stuffed after their land and resources are taken away. We also do not want few kilos of rice to live from one day to another. We want our land," she says, with the poise of a seasoned speaker.

"Livelihood and food security are two of the biggest questions today for people who have been left out of the political manifestos. Under the current policies, the agricultural fields are being sold out and paddy fields are being turned into flower gardens," she adds.

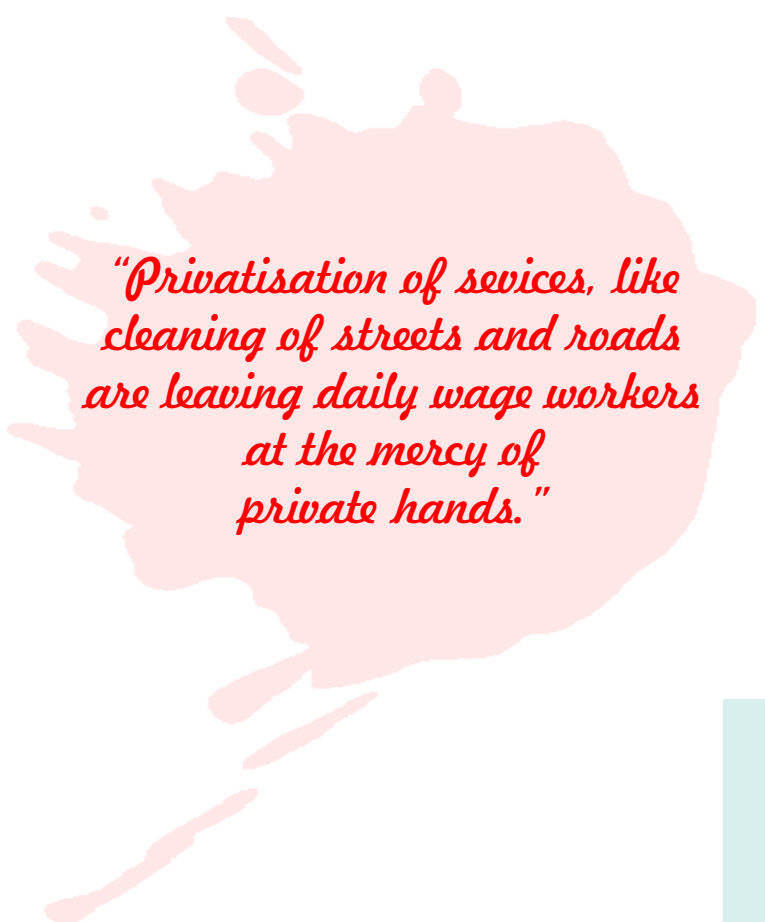
But having been in a movement that has seen over 7,000 acres of land being claimed by women from some of the most marginalised communities, she knows the value of struggle.

"Elections will come and go. But our struggle will continue relentlessly. We want to grow our own food. That is the real power that women want, which only land can give," she asserts.

She is also clear on the linkage between poverty in villages and the urban poor and says: "Without land and livelihood, people migrate to cities. But the cities turn into a place of unending struggle for them."



Image : Parvinder/ActionAid



"Privatisation of services, like cleaning of streets and roads are leaving daily wage workers at the mercy of private hands."

Community needs to wrest political power

Her work as a landless agriculture worker and a four year long association with the land struggle has left 29-year-old Vanaja convinced that the present government policies are making poor communities increasingly marginalised.

"I have not got land yet. But those women who have got it through struggle are leading a life of dignity and respect. Their family members do not migrate. Since they do not have to rush to cities in search for work, children do not have to drop out from schools," she says.

"Mechanisation is leaving poor people without work these days. The projects and construction work do not need manual work any longer. Privatisation of services, like cleaning of streets and roads are leaving daily wage workers vulnerable and at the mercy of private hands," she adds.

She likes attending meetings and campaigns on land rights. "These allow me to understand how our poverty is linked to bad policies. We also get to know about the way we are being impacted by privatisation, and also how we can fight it.

" On the upcoming elections, she says "women from the community need to content elections." "The struggle will be more effective with political power in the hands of poor," she asserts.



Image : ActionAid

Act, don't give inducements



"In the last elections, a political party offered clothes and sweets if people voted for its candidates."

Over two hundred women from some of the most vulnerable sections came together in Gujarat's capital Gandhinagar ahead of national elections to demand land, livelihood and state support for single women.

These issues had totally been missed out by the political parties. Out of the 200 participants, who took part in this event, 90 were single women. A telling detail about the focus of demands that were to emerge from the gathering organised by ActionAid partners.

Single but united

These women organised themselves under the banner of Mahila Swabhiman Manch to come out with charter of demands targeted towards political parties. These listed needs of Dalit, single women, women living with HIV/AIDS, Muslims, tribal and urban poor.

"The demands have been presented to Gujarat BJP women's wing president Madhuben Patel, the Congress and noted danseuse Mallika Sarabhai, who is taking on Advani as an independent," says Sushila Prajapati of ActionAid.

The overarching demands that found a massive endorsement from the participating single women were, fifty percent ownership title in women's name while marrying and five acres of land for Dalit women.

The demands also included priority to single and HIV positive women in government housing schemes, life-time pension and making inheritance of property easy. The demands for Muslim women, included joint ownership of property and housing for the survivors of the 2002 communal strife in the name of women.

Not inducements, actions demanded

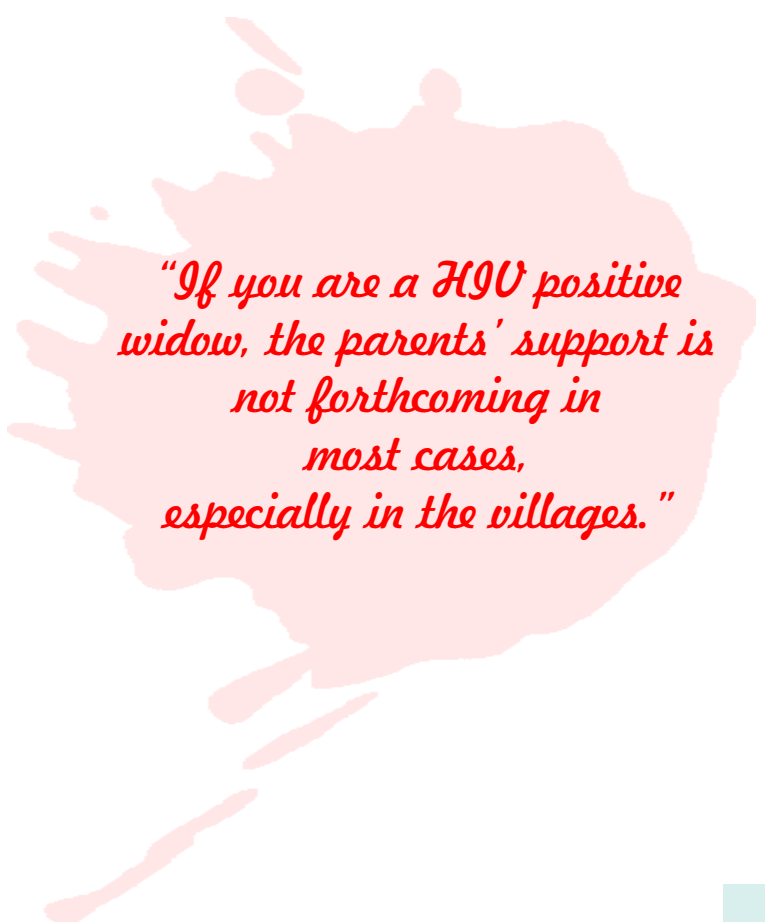
"In the last elections, a political party offered clothes and sweets if people voted for its candidates," says Jivaben Thakore from Kutch.

Displaying an acute awareness of their political rights even as Madhuben Patel was speaking in response to their demands, Gomti Chavda of Ekal Nari Shakti Manch in Kutch stood up to say: "We are being deprived of their fundamental rights of food and shelter."

A young HIV positive woman said that they are not given widow pension and the authorities question them for a guarantee that they would not re-marry. Saeedabanu from Juhapura in Ahmedabad asked about the process for contesting elections. "I am keen to contest. Someone from my locality can contest next time. It will be helpful as we can work for our area," she said.



Image : ActionAid



"If you are a HIV positive widow, the parents' support is not forthcoming in most cases, especially in the villages."

I need a house and medicines

Thirty-year-old Jagruti Patel from Surat lives alone with her 10-year-old son, both of them are HIV positive. Her husband passed away because of the same infection.

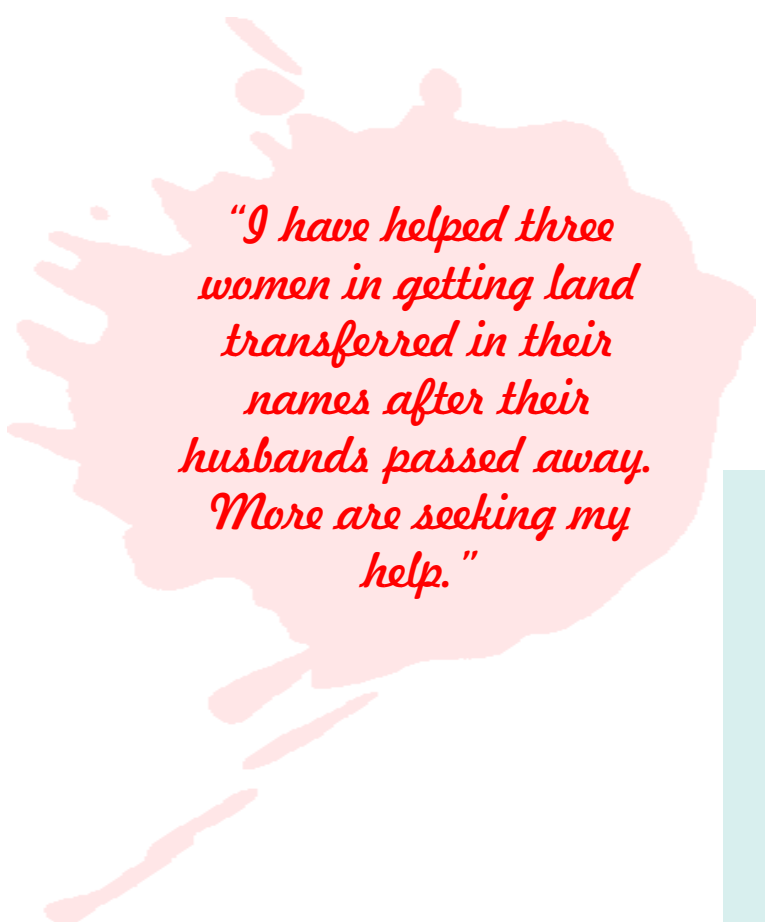
"Under usual circumstances, a widow gets support from her parents. But if you are HIV+, the parents' support is not forthcoming in majority of the cases, especially in villages," she says.

"We are unable to get the benefit of government housing schemes as we do not have necessary documents like husband's death certificate. How one can have a death certificate when the woman is not even allowed to see her husband's face when he dies," she asks.

Jagruti earns Rs 5,000 a month working in ActionAid. Out of this, Rs 1,200 is paid towards rent. "The in-laws are not ready to keep our children, who are HIV+ but they have no problems in keeping children if they are not positive," she says.



Image : ActionAid



"I have helped three women in getting land transferred in their names after their husbands passed away. More are seeking my help."

I got my independence and dignity

Her struggle to own land and grow her own food by after death of her husband eight years ago, has turned 70-year-old Ambaben Khunt into an inspiration for single women in Gujarat's Panchmahal district.

"I wanted the land in my name, when my husband died. I did not have a clue on what to do. My sons joined the village head to stop me," says Ambaben.

After being contacted by members from SARTHI, a local civil society group working on women's rights particularly that of owning property, she learnt about legal processes to get the land transferred in her name.

This struggle not only allowed her to become an independent person but also find a mission for herself.

"I have helped three women in getting the land transferred in their names after their husbands passed away. More are seeking my help," she says.

Now with the land transferred in her name, Akhamben commands respect from her sons. She is empowered and knows about her rights. "Even if village leaders come when I am busy, I tell him to wait," she says.

She wants that a women should be able to get land transferred on their names after the husband passes away.


Being a land owner she is already looking ahead to issues of productivity and feels that large dams have adverse impact on small farmers as the water from river gets diverted for consumption in urban centres.

"We stay in the areas where there are dams. This water, however, goes to other areas and we do not even get drinking water. Forget about water for irrigation also."



Image : Gunshe/ActionAid

Women lobby for rights



"Displacing hundreds of thousands of poor people from their homes and livelihoods in not development."

In the run up to India's general election, over 150 women leaders from marginalised groups, including tribal, Dalit, fisherfolk, weavers, persons with disability and people living with HIV, came together in Hyderabad recently, urging political parties to take account of their demands in key policy agendas.

The women and other community leaders from 14 districts of Andhra Pradesh met at the two-day conclave organised by ActionAid and partner organisations. Political leaders from Congress, Telugu Desam Party, Loksatta Party, Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI-M and Praja Rajyam came to meet the women activists.

Post polls women leaders intend to continue campaigning for land rights and urging the newly elected government to protect traditional livelihoods from being devoured by big businesses.

'This is not development'

The women leaders rejected the present "model of development" that supports Special Economic Zones or SEZs and Coastal Corridors whilst displacing hundreds of thousands of poor people from their homes and livelihoods.

"If such displacement continues, there would be no fisherfolk left on the seashores of Andhra Pradesh," says Raghu P who leads ActionAid's work in the state.

"The government does not discuss livelihood issues, and gives the impression that profiting the rich would automatically help the poor," stated Professor Kodanda Ram of Osmania University, while highlighting that political parties were luring voters with attention-grabbing offers like rice for Rs 2 a kilo.

Editor of a popular Telugu magazine Bhoomika and women's rights activist Kondaveeti Satyavati said "Women from various marginalised communities are taking leadership of fight against displacement as they have to feed their families," she says. "More than men, women realise the need to question the present development model," she adds.

Reclaiming rights

ActionAid partner Andhra Pradesh Dalit Samakhya (APDS), has been campaigning in five districts for five acres of land to be given to every Dalit woman.

"We want land, not colour TV or loans with 25 paise interest," says Aswathamma of APDS.

Applications of 50,000 Dalit women seeking land were submitted to Y S R Reddy, the state chief minister, in 2007 but the government is yet to respond.



Image : ActionAid

Political parties react

According to Ramachandraiah of TDP, the women's charter of demands is an eye-opener for all political parties. "The demands reflect the real situation on the ground," he points out.

Purushothama Rao of Congress agreed that the demands need serious attention.

Stating that SEZs are dangerous, he warned that the corporate sector would soon view 80 percent of present work force as surplus.

Rama Devi of Loksatta supports allocation of the Finance and Home ministries to women and said that only women can recognise women's problems. "I am sure there would not be any violence against women if a woman is made the home minister," she said.

Just the beginning

D S Prasad of Organisation for Rural Reconstruction, an ActionAid partner urged the women activists to present these demands to contesting candidates in all constituencies and seek their commitment.

"This is just the beginning of a long running struggle and should continue till a pro-poor government is formed in the state," he adds.



Image : Gunshe/ActionAid

Tribals are being ousted in large numbers

"We tribals have title deeds to land, but most of it has been occupied by non-tribals for decades. Government officials are not helping us to get hold of our land."

"We tribals have title for land, but most of it has now been occupied by non-tribals. Government officials are not helping us to get our land," says S Sudha, 20-year-old indigenous woman activist from Eathamanguda village in Srikakulam district.

To attend the recent meeting of women activists and political leaders in Hyderabad, it took Sudha two hours to reach Amudalavalasa, a town near her village. From there she took a bus to arrive at the meeting, making it a journey of 20 hours.

Sudha has completed schooling but could not go to college as she had to take care of her mother. She has been working with Adivasi Seva Samgham, a tribal group supported by ActionAid partner Action Rural Technology and Services, that mobilises tribal women to fight for their rights.

"The present development model advocated by the government is threatening the very livelihoods of tribals. As the government hands over land to granite mining corporations, tribals cannot continue shifting cultivation," she says.

Stressing the need to preserve livelihoods of tribals, Sudha states that all projects such as the Polavaram project should be stopped immediately. "These projects are ousting tribals from their villages in large numbers." Polavaram is deemed to be a massive irrigation project along the length of Godavari that would displace nearly 300,000 tribal persons.

With livelihoods vanishing, tribal families are running short of food. They also don't have access to health care. Even for a simple disease like fever, they have to travel 15 kilometres for medical treatment. Childbirth facilities don't exist near their homes. Plus, tribal women have to walk for at least three kilometres to get drinking water.

"Without proper roads and public transport, sick people are taken to the hospital on bicycles. Though jobs are being offered under the government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which promises 100 days of work to any rural resident, the tribal population is unable to benefit because of irregular payments," reveals Sudha.

She raises awareness among tribal women about their customs and various government schemes including NREGA. Sudha also encourages women to campaign for better health care.

According to her, the government should take steps to ensure medical and educational facilities for all tribals. Food security is also critical and Sudha suggests government schemes could encourage cultivation of food crops rather than cash crops.



Image : Gunshe/ActionAid

Our sea; Our shore



"Government's Coastal Corridor project will destroy our traditional fishing work."

"New government policies are threatening traditional livelihoods of fisher folk," says Surada Devi, a 28-year-old woman activist from Gangadipalem village of Visakhapatnam.

Devi is the co-convener of ActionAid-supported Visakha Zilla Sampradaya Matsyakarula Samakhya (Visakhapatnam District Traditional Fisherfolk Federation). For eight years she has been rallying other women of the fishing community to fight for their rights.

"Government's Coastal Corridor project will destroy our traditional fishing work," Devi says. The state government has plans to build a coastal corridor along the nearly 1000 km coast line from Srikakulam district to Nellore, where industries including petrochemicals would set shop.

Though the project has been shelved, the fishing community fears this is just a ploy to woo voters before the elections, says Devi.

Already, the new Gangavaram port near Vishakapatnam and a petrochemical factory in Kakinada district have displaced hundreds of fisherfolk. Those who have not left their homes are being denied access to the fishing areas.

As per Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 1991 (CRZ), no construction activities are allowed within 500 meters of the sea shore. Government now plans to flout this rule, says Devi. A new Coastal Zone Management (CZM) regulation has been proposed, which seeks to topple the earlier CRZ law and industrialise coastal areas.

"We have been consistently protesting against the government's ill-intentioned development policies, but there has been no response from either officials or elected politicians," she states.

Ahead of the current polls she and other women activists met all the contesting candidates of the Bhimili assembly constituency in Vishakapatnam. "All candidates show sympathy to our cause, but none of them agrees to sign on papers in support of our demands," she reveals.

To drive home their point, Devi took pains to travel 12 hours by bus to attend the recent women's meeting with political leaders in Hyderabad.

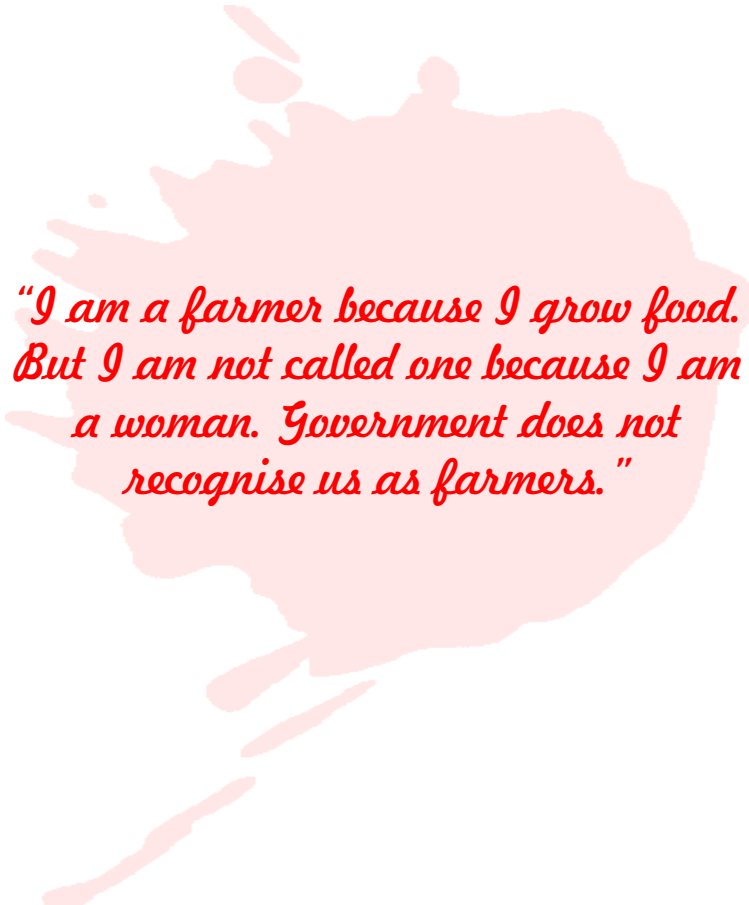
Fishing women's demands include effective implementation of CRZ Notification and scrapping of CMZ and costal corridor proposals. Devi believes that right now political leaders are unable to understand the significance of these demands. "They have no idea of how dangerous present government policies can be," she comments.

With diminishing access to fishing, already men from fishing families have had to leave for other towns and cities in search of daily wage work. Also, fisherfolk in Andhra Pradesh do not get to sell their produce in local markets. That, and scarce transport facilities force the women to walk long distances and sell fish in villages. Consequently, many fisher women have fallen sick.



Image : Prashant/ActionAid

Women invoke the Constitution



"I am a farmer because I grow food. But I am not called one because I am a woman. Government does not recognise us as farmers."

On the eve of 15th Lok Sabha elections, over 400 women came together in Mumbai under the banner of the Maharashtra Mahila Maha Panchay to present their demands to the chiefs of women's wing of different political parties.

In a symbolic gesture, two tribal women, Gulab and Jhubru, opened the meeting by garlanding a copy of the Indian Constitution to highlight its underlying and empowering feature of equality.

Strength in unity

The platform of women from across the state that is spearheading a campaign to highlight women's issues of land and livelihood in political debates and agendas is a consortium of 28 non governmental and community organisations.

The charter of demand presented to the representatives of the political parties was arrived at after a massive consultation involving 35 districts in Maharashtra. The platform has been active for the past three years and has been growing with increasing awareness among marginalized women.

The slogans that resonated the venue gave a sense of unity and articulation the women have grown towards their rights and demands.

The most popular slogan was: "All the Questions are for whom, for the people for the people. All the Politics is for whom, for the people for the people. All the manifestos are for whom, for the people for the people."

Asking questions

"I am a farmer because I grow food. But I am not called a farmer because I am a woman. Even government does not recognise a woman as a farmer," says 55-years-old Kaushalya Bai from Amravati. She is with Apeksha Women's Society.

But she feels being part of the campaign has given them strength and a formidable voice as she adds: "One had to raise voice and ask questions...questions on basics such as health, education and immediate justice for the victims of violence."

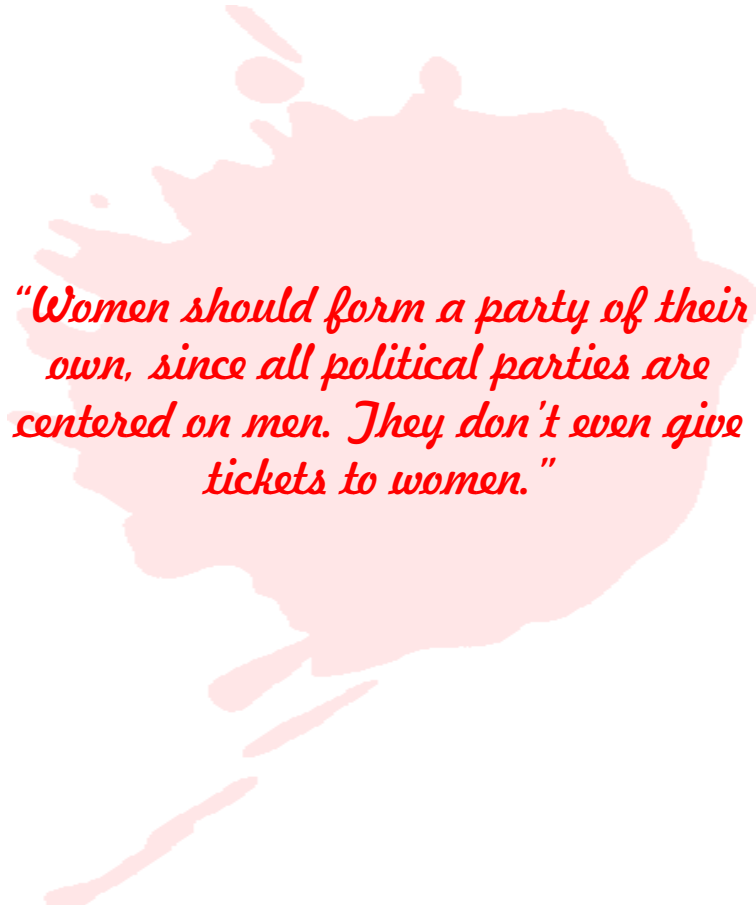
Women leaders also spoke on the failures of the manifestos of the major political parties and the presidents of the women's wings of the political parties present reacted positively to the criticisms.

"The political system and the political parties in India are dominated by men. It is a necessity for women to come together" said Pushpatai Bonde of Congress, while adding: "We get all the support to run the party organisation, but when it comes to power and position, we don't get anything."



Image : Pramod/ActionAid

Land will set us free!



"Women should form a party of their own, since all political parties are centered on men. They don't even give tickets to women."

Dalit and tribal women from two of India's poorest states gathered ahead of the national elections to voice their demands which have not found a space on the wish list of various political parties seeking mandate from the voters.

Coming together in two meetings in Bihar's capital Patna and Jharkhand's capital Ranchi, they reiterated their demands for land ownership, entitlements and basic state facility for healthcare.

A culture of struggle

Ranchi saw a large participation from tribal women. The meeting was interspersed with slogans and gave a feel of a vibrant campaign setting with slogans like: "Ranchi ki hum nariyan, jalti ye chingarian" (we are women of Ranchi and are alive like a fireball). Around 185 tribal women from tribal belt of Giridih, Goddah, Ranchi, Palamau, Latehar etc. demanded a clear focus on empowering tribal women. For many of them this was first of its kind experience, but there were many women who shared success stories to inspire them.

"I have fought with many single women and will continue to fight for their land rights not just in my village but also in the villages nearby," says a defiant Sushanna Murmu, who leads a 24-member women's group, while adding "land will set us free from the dependence and poverty".

Working since 2004, the group conducts training programs through the state agriculture department to equip women to grow vegetables and earn a decent living. Women from six villages have benefited from the training.

"Tribals working under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) had not got their daily wages. We took up the case with the labour inspector. Not only did we get the due but also an additional amount as a fine," said 32-year-old Sunita Devi, who is a member of the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan.


Wresting power

At Patna, the atmosphere at the conclave was brimming with optimism and resolve, with over 400 women from Dalit community taking part. The focus of the conclave revolved around the neo-liberal policy and its impact on the lives of women.

"Earlier, I used to just stay at home, but now I am out and empowered," said Meena Devi, a leading Dalit women rights activist from Nathupur village near Patna, while adding that more and more from women are now taking part in elections and functioning of the village councils. The women now want to use this advantage to make livelihood regeneration schemes functional.



Image : Pramod/ActionAid



"Earlier I used to stay at home, but see, now I am out and empowered."

We are the change

A homemaker turned activist from Nathupur village in Patna, Bihar, 48-year-old Meena Devi has been driving the idea of women in her village taking charge of their lives by actively taking interest in local village self-governance systems.

Initially she had a tough time making the women in her community to open up. She even traveled to Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, to see how panchayati system works, and came back enriched with real life experiences. She started several development projects in her own village and interacted with public administration to facilitate growth and development of her own area.

She now works with a group called Bikas Swayam Sahayata Samuha. There are now a hundred odd samuhas comprising of fourteen women members each. On fourteenth of every month the women participates in large number to discuss different issues.

"Prayas Gramin Vikas Samiti, a partner of ActionAid helped these women in the formation of samuhas and facilitating other legal and administrative process required to actualize their work. She now works actively on livelihood restoration for widows and providing a realistic and viable employment option to make the life of these widows sustainable on a long run. She also takes initiative to encourage kids to go to school and get the basic formal education.

"Earlier I used to stay at home, but see, now I am out and empowered" says Meena Devi while further pointing out the fact that, earlier there was very little participation from among the women, but now women have less doubt in their mind and are more open in their outlook.



Image : Pramod/ActionAid



"I lobbied in the media and forced the local official to give a woman her land back."

Fighting for self and others

She got an assignment of teaching in a local village level school in the year 1997 only to get married within three years time. But this time she again got an opportunity to pursue her studies, which she happily took up.

As time passed, she felt the need to get involved in the greater societal evils that she sustained at one point of time in her life as an individual woman and as a member of a tribal community which was already undergoing a lot of oppression of severe level in every front of life.

She started working on and addressing important issues like public health and food security affecting the tribal community in a bigger scale. In the year 2002, a platform with the name, Gram Swaraj Abhiyan was formed to address the above issues.

Very soon she started actively working on cases of sexual violation within the community and several cases involving crime against women in the name of witchcraft, which were actually cases wherein the male members forcibly acquired land rights from the women members within the tribal community.


"In one such instance, I lobbied in the media and forced the local civil administration to impose necessary punishment to the accused male members and ultimately helped the women member concerned, getting back her due land rights" says Sunita Devi with a smile in her face. She is now thirty four years of age and leading a happy family life with her husband and three children. In yet another case of her involvement into a social cause, she create an example of sort to the whole tribal community by successfully helping out the fellow tribal folks receive their dues who were working under NREGA scheme, but not getting their daily wages.

She took up the case with the Labour Inspector and compelled the local administration pay not only the due amount to the women members of the tribal community but also additionally receive a certain amount as fine for not giving the women their dues as a daily wage worker under the Central Government initiated employment scheme called National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).



Image : Parvinder/ActionAid

We want our livelihood



"If women are not aware and allowed participation in household decisions how will they fight election at village level."

Over 50 women gathered in the scenic capital of Himachal Pradesh to make a united pitch for demanding control of land and livelihood resources to address the issue of poverty and empowerment.

The meeting was held as a part of the national pre-election campaign organised by hundreds of community organisation to highlight issues that have been left out of the party manifestos of political parties. These issue impact the marignalised communities in general and women in particular.

Poverty linked with denial

In a state that has very low level of eduction among girls, the women leaders have been able to clearly eastablish a link between poverty and they not being allowed ownership of property and being kept away from decision making.

"We also want to be incharge of our lives. I am tired of threat from my husband that he will throw me out," say Durga Devi, 40, from Sirmur. "If we also own land, it will not be sold for alcohol as it happens now," she adds.

"If we get land we will get power," Lajwanti said echoing Devi's statement.

The women who gathered at the conclave also highlighted the issue of trafficking of young girls. "When land is sold and livelihood in not regular, girls become victim of hunger as men sell them," said Bimla.

A core demand that the women highlighted and wanted to be addressed was of ownership of land and homes.

State must support women

"We are given only Rs. 300 as widows pension. Do you think anyone can live with dignity in this kind of money," asked Shanti.

The hill state has highest number of incidents of violence against women. Molestation and rapes are linked by there women to graining poverty and lack of power to the women both at the level of family and community.

The health facilities in the villages are in shambles and women identified it as one of the most important needs of the region. "The primary health centres are in bad shape. Pregnant women are very vulnerable to death due to delay in availability of healthcare support and medical attention," said Bimla.



Image : ActionAid

Ration shops not alcohol

“Since men sit in the village council it is easier to get liquor outlets opened than have a ration shop,” amended Lajwanti.

The women rebate this to lack of implementation of a legal provision that reserves seats for women in the village council.

“If women are not aware and allowed participation in household decisions how will they fight election at village level,” added Shanti.

Why are women so vulnerable to hunger?

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by hunger due to existing social inequalities – particularly those relating to education, nutrition and income. Property rights are also a major issue, with inheritance practices often discriminating harshly against women.

As a result, while women produce most of the food in developing countries, they own only 1% of the land. Privatisation also strips them of access to valuable natural resources.

What role do women play in the production of food?

Rural women produce between 60 and 80% of the food in developing countries:


- 80 to 90% in Sub-Saharan African states
- 50 to 90% in Asia
- 30% in Central and Eastern Europe

The number of female-headed households in rural areas is increasing. In Sub-Saharan Africa 31% of rural households are headed by women, while in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean women head 17% and 14% of households respectively.



Image : ActionAid

Give women access to land



"Land and livelihood resources are deeply connected with a woman's food safety."

Around 300 women from across the desert state of Rajasthan met at the capital city of Jaipur for a daylong state level women's meet. The women leaders raised issues regarding women's access and control of land, shelter and resources on a joint platform. The meeting also saw participation from prominent women's rights activists of the state.

The first half of the meet was to build an understanding of the ongoing struggles for land and livelihood rights of women. While the second half saw presentation of the charter of demand. Women from different parts of the state shared their stories and testimonies.

"Land and resources are very deeply connected to the food safety of women. Out of every three women, two are malnourished. The situation is worse in tribal areas," said Ms. Kavita Srivastava, a prominent activist from Rajasthan state while addressing the delegates and participants at the meeting.

Ms. Sejal Dave from Working Group for Women Land Ownership, Gujarat said that "Government common land must be under the control of the community especially women's group". She further detailed on the assertion practices and experiences on women's struggle to gain control over land and resources.

Ms. Soma KP, an activist and researcher on women's resource rights addressed the participants on how land is more than just an asset for women; that is attached to their dignity and identity. She also shared her experiences from the land rights struggle by women in Uttarakhand.

Ms. Sunitha Sathyarathi, lawyer High Court shared with the participants, the legal aspects of land and property ownership.

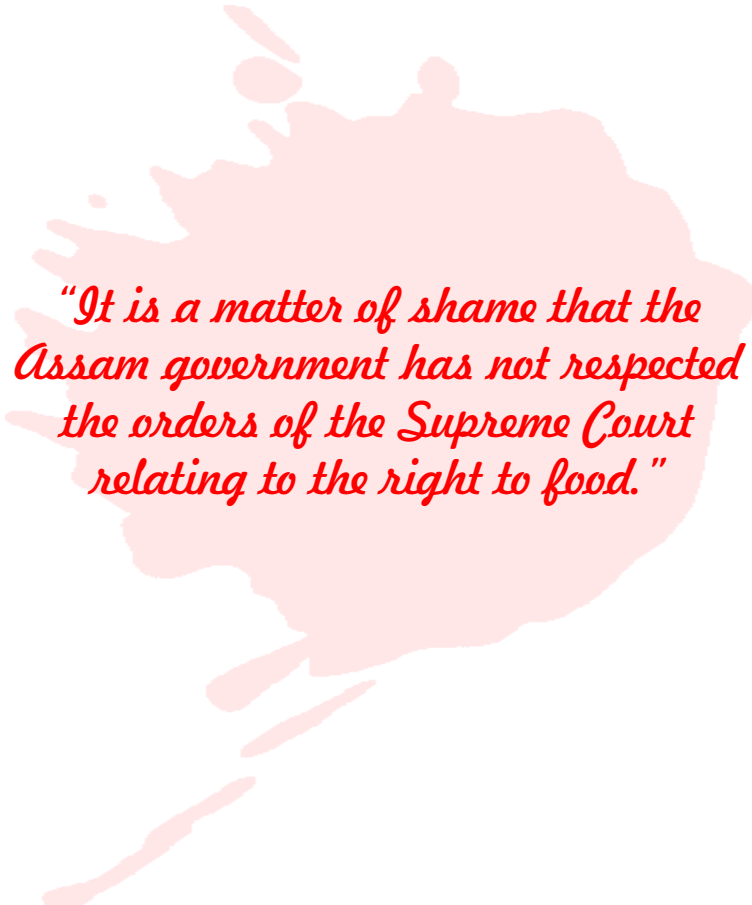
Women leaders from Barmer presented the Joint demand charter and showcased cases ranging from government apathy and corruption in giving widow pension and forest patta to witch hunting and domestic violence on women to forcibly acquire property.

Justice Yamin concluded the whole session by stressing on the fact that, there is a need for legal awareness among women which is equally necessary.



Image : ActionAid

Better implementation of NREGA and PDS



"It is a matter of shame that the Assam government has not respected the orders of the Supreme Court relating to the right to food."

Ahead of elections, over 500 indigenous women and men from 10 districts of Assam met in Guwahati to highlight the dysfunctions of government systems that provide work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and subsidised ration.

As many as six partner organisations of ActionAid including Society for Social Transformation and Environment Protection, Gramiya Vikas Mancha, Rural Volunteer Centre, Action North East Trust and North East Affected Area Development Society took part in the convention held by People's Rights Forum, a network of over 15 civil society organisations. Sunil Kaul and Anju Talukdar, state advisors on right to food appointed by the Supreme Court, also attended the meeting.

Problems besetting the public distribution system (PDS) that provides subsidised grains, sugar, kerosene and edible oil are many, stated several villagers from across the state.

"Kerosene oil, pulses and wheat flour have not been reaching the PDS centres for many years," says Cecelia Khozol of ActionAid.

"In fact numerous families do not even know about the existence of PDS and the government has not made an effort to raise awareness about this entitlement," Cecilia adds. Assam has a large population of tribal persons.

Corroborating Cecelia's statement, Sheila Boro, a 39-year-old tribal woman says, "I have never heard of kerosene oil. We have to cut wood for cooking."

Neema (her name changed) says, "We poor people do not get ration cards despite repeated appeals but rich families have them." Villagers said they refrain from using the Right to Information as they fear reprisal threats by PDS staff.

Plus, PDS centres in the state often distribute grains at night. Activists point out this is a ploy to cover up the poor quality of rice. A 70-year-old woman says, "How can old people like me go to ration shops at night? They are located in far off towns and we live in villages."

Those who do manage to reach ration shops get subsidised items less than what they are entitled to and at a higher rate. They are people who live below the poverty line.

A matter of shame

"It is unfortunate and a matter of shame that the Assam government has not respected the orders of the Supreme Court relating to right to food," says lawyer Saito Basumatary, who is an ActionAid coordinator and a convenor of Peoples' Rights Forum. "We have submitted several memorandums to the state government but no action has been taken," he adds.



Image : Gunshe/ActionAid

Right to food

The Rajasthan-based People's Union for Civil Liberties had submitted a written petition to the apex court in 2001, demanding that the country's massive food stocks be used straight away to save people from hunger. As a result, the Supreme Court has issued interim orders at crucial moments to address problems of food security among the most disadvantaged communities.

One such landmark Supreme Court ruling made PDS mandatory and was one of the first achievements of India's right to food campaign.

But Assam has not complied with many orders. For instance, beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme, who are the poorest of the poor, are supposed to get 10 kilos of free grains. But in Assam they have not received their entitlements since October 2006.

Safety net full of holes

Tasiduk Ariful Hussain, Director of North East Social Trust moderated the discussion on NREGA.


NREGA that promises 100 days of work to rural folk is also not being successfully implemented in Assam.

Village council leaders often do not issue job cards to all applicants and those who are given work are often paid late.



Image : Esha/ActionAid

Festival of our land



"From the time a girl is born, she is told that her only work is to look after the house."

The economic policies of privatisation are proving to be a major obstacle for women's empowerment and their fight for rights, said women at a massive gathering of 3500 people from marginalised communities in Karnataka ahead of national elections.

Organised by Swaraj Women's Rights network, the conclave was inaugurated by folk artist and environmentalist Nadoja Saroja Eeramma.

United in struggle

The event was nothing short of a festival of unity among the marginalised. The women from the Madiga, Madivala, Soliga, Uppara, Kuruba, Kumbara, and Nayaka communities came together for the first time after fifteen years in this strategic program organized by the Swaraj network in collaboration with other progressive organisations in Chamrajnagar.

"We face discrimination from the upper castes. We have got one acre of land from the Government but we want good educational facilities for our children and the abolishment of the Devadasi system," says Gauri, who hails from a tribal community, while explaining the plight of women belonging to backward classes.

Renuka, a HIV positive, said the Government needed to create awareness among the people about the plight of HIV positive people, particularly women who got the disease from their husband.

"I am a HIV positive patient and have been since the last eight years. I got the infection through my husband who died four years ago. We have three children, only one is HIV positive," she said.

Explaining how society discriminated women, Radha, a sex worker, who began a campaign against ill treatment of sex workers by the police, said: "From the time a girl is born, she is told that her only work is to look after the house. The women are victims of violence be it at home or outside."

Wave of consciousness

The meeting marked culmination of a grassroots process involving non governmental organisations, networks and movements in the most backward areas of Karnataka.

Women articulated their struggles and the change they want in terms of land and access to resources. The campaign centered on women's access to employment, land, public wealth, education, health and political power.



Image : Esha/ActionAid

Landless women agricultural workers, small farmers, single mothers, Devadasis, tribal, Dalit, positive women, sex workers and persons with disability converged from different parts of the state to share their experiences and to forge for a collective struggle and co-option of community resources and loss of livelihood.

"I will lose a day's wage. But I am happy to have come for this meeting. So many poor women have come," said 34-year-old Susheela, from Terambali and added: "Now the state will listen to the voice of the oppressed."

Why is access to land and natural resources an issue for women?

Despite doing most of the work to produce food, women own less than 1-2% of rural land in the global South. In many African countries, women lose all rights to cultivate their husband's land when he dies.

This has a serious impact on women's ability to grow their own food, or to use land to secure loans or other income.

The lack of access to vital resources is a key reason why women suffer disproportionately from hunger.

Even when women do have secure access to land, they may not have access to other necessary resources to feed themselves or their families.


In particular, seeds that previously may have been gathered for free are increasingly 'owned' by multinational companies and are too expensive to obtain. Water, already scarce in many areas where hunger is acute, becomes more difficult to procure through discriminatory practices and privatisation.

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 obliges governments to guarantee women equal access to land and other resources. It is crucially important to improve women's right to land (and to inherit land) and other resources in order to deliver the right to food.



Image : Nilayan/ActionAid

We shall prevail



“Work by women at home is not recognised for its economic value. There needs to be a legislation giving it status of work as is given to other workers”.

Women from the urban homeless community, people living in slums and women with disability, agricultural workers, Muslim women, beedi workers, women fish workers and the zari workers participated in a conclave at Kolkata in West Bengal.

To start the day a beautiful tribal dance, depicting the plight of the tribal women and denial of their rights by the local administration, was performed by women from Banchita Janajagaran Adhikar Samiti of Purulia.

Women articulated their grievances against the government for not safeguarding the rights of disabled and tribal. They also pressed for their demand for BPL cards and Job cards under the NREGA scheme, voter's identity cards, equal rights for tribal women, muslim women and women with disabilities and the guarantee of receiving the pensions for the aged persons and the widows.

Women also spoke about the violation of labour rights that they face in their lives.

Dr Manab Sen, a retired government official formed participants about redressal mechanisms that can be used by the women to fight for their rights.

Swapan Ganguly of Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samiti, a resource person on women's labour rights stated: “Work by women at home is not recognised for its economic value. There needs to be a legislation giving it status of work as is given to other workers”.

He highlighted legal provisions on securing the rights of the unorganised labour and demanded implementation of the NREGS Act in West Bengal.

The Institute of Factual Arts presented a skit called *Gono Istehar* (People's Charter). It was a skit in five scenes depicting various socio – political cum economic maladies affecting the women folk. The show ended with a positive note with the women humming to the tune of the song ‘We shall overcome’ in several languages.



Image : Laxman/ActionAid

Positive women call for land, food and HIV law



"We are fighting for laws to ensure a better and secure life for HIV positive persons and their families."

Ahead of the general elections, over 300 HIV positive women from across Orissa met political leaders to enact the HIV/AIDS law. Women leaders also urged for land, pensions and subsidised ration for people living with HIV/AIDS in the state.

A two-day conclave was organised by ActionAid-supported network Shraddha and Orissa AIDS Solidarity Forum. Shraddha is known as the 'Network of Positive Thinking Women'.

Mamata Mallick, a 28 year old HIV positive woman of Goudabadi village in Puri district, hopes that women living with HIV/AIDS are no longer forced to suffer in silence.

"We are fighting for laws to ensure a better and secure life for HIV positive persons and their families. I hope we would be successful in our mission," she says exuding confidence.

Political will needed

Political leaders including Prasanna Patasani and Narendra Swain of Biju Janata Dal, Archana Nayak of the Bhartiya Janata and Prasanna Panda of the Communist Party of India took part in a panel discussion on the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Niraj Mishra of Orissa AIDS Solidarity Forum said HIV/AIDS should be made an election issue to attain better living conditions for those affected by the virus. "Political will and commitment are crucial for fighting this virus," he points out.

Women discussed the importance of raising awareness about the virus and timely treatment of infected persons at the conclave.

Keeping spirits high

The campaigners avidly screened films with messages by leading actors and social workers inspiring people living with HIV to lead a fulfilling life and keep their morale high against all odds.

A five minute theme song 'Haath se Haath Mila (Join hands)' featuring a host of Bollywood stars including John Abraham, Shilpa Shetty, Sunil Shetty, Fardeen Khan, Nasiruddin Shah, Tabu, Bipasha Basu, Raveena Tandon and Lara Dutta enthused the women with the value of collective strength.

The media including several news channels took an active interest in the conclave. Positive women did not hesitate to recount their stories of struggle before the media.

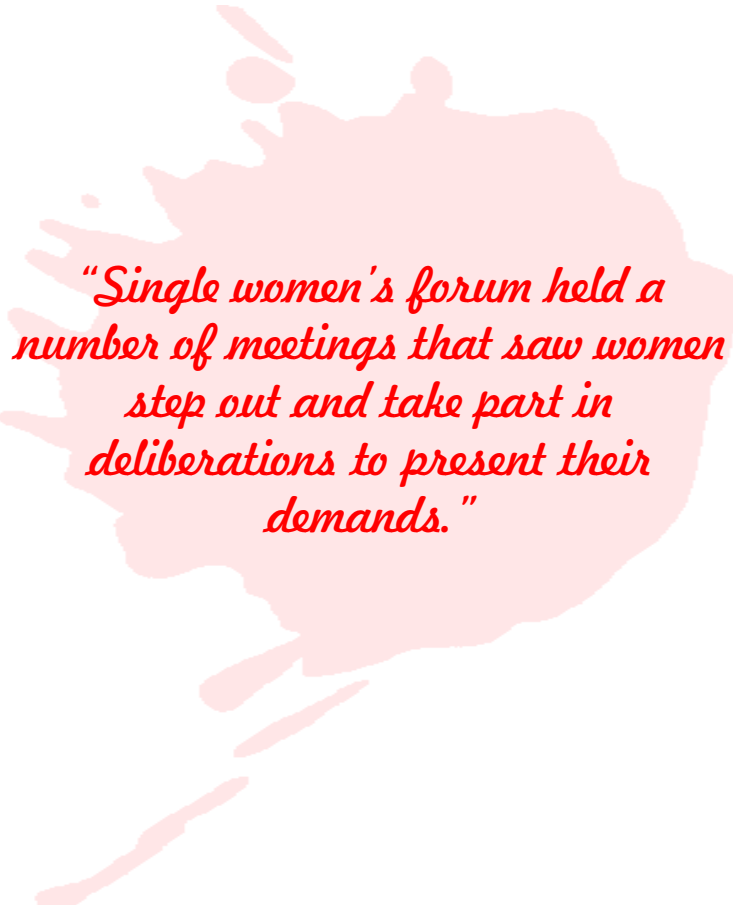
"We share our stories so that other people can be made aware of the stigma we go through daily. We also want women and men who have not been infected to take precautionary steps to keep the virus at bay," says Namita Nanda of Shraddha.



Image : Dipankar/ActionAid

N

othing about us without us



"Single women's forum held a number of meetings that saw women step out and take part in deliberations to present their demands."

Street plays, cycle rallies, door-to-door campaigns, public meetings, graffiti writing and meetings with electoral candidates marked a pre-election campaign by ActionAid supported groups in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

As in other states, the campaign in these two states engaged people from excluded and marginalised communities to present demands they felt were the most important to them, but had been left out by political parties. This process went alongside election campaigns and announcement of manifestos by party candidates to woo voters, for over a month, unleashing aspirations of some of the poorest people, including women, in the region.

For the women by the women

About half a dozen women's organisations held a foot march in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district demanding dignity, security and livelihood for single women. Over 500 community people, largely women, turned up for this and raised slogans.

Single women's forum held a number of meetings that saw women step out and take part in deliberations to present their demands. Through these programmes, women were reached out to in Sitapur, Rae Bareilly, Varanasi, Hardoi, Azamgarh, Kanpur, Pratapgarh and Jaunpur districts.

The meetings allowed women to find creative ways of expressing their needs, through graffiti, folk songs and plays. Organisations like 'Voices of single Women, Dalit Vikas Manch, Ekal Mahila Manch and Muslim Tarraki Afata Manch, which are focused on rights of marginalised women, reached out to common voters as well taking the issues beyond the meeting venues.

The charter of demands that emerged from these processes saw a strong demand for giving women common property rights, specific allocations for women in schemes for housing and jobs for the poor. Participation of women in the local self-governance institutions also found a strong pitch during these meetings.

'Save our rivers'

In the hill state of Uttarakhand, which is home to some of India's largest river dam projects, the issue of peoples' resources being commercialised and displacement were raised strongly.

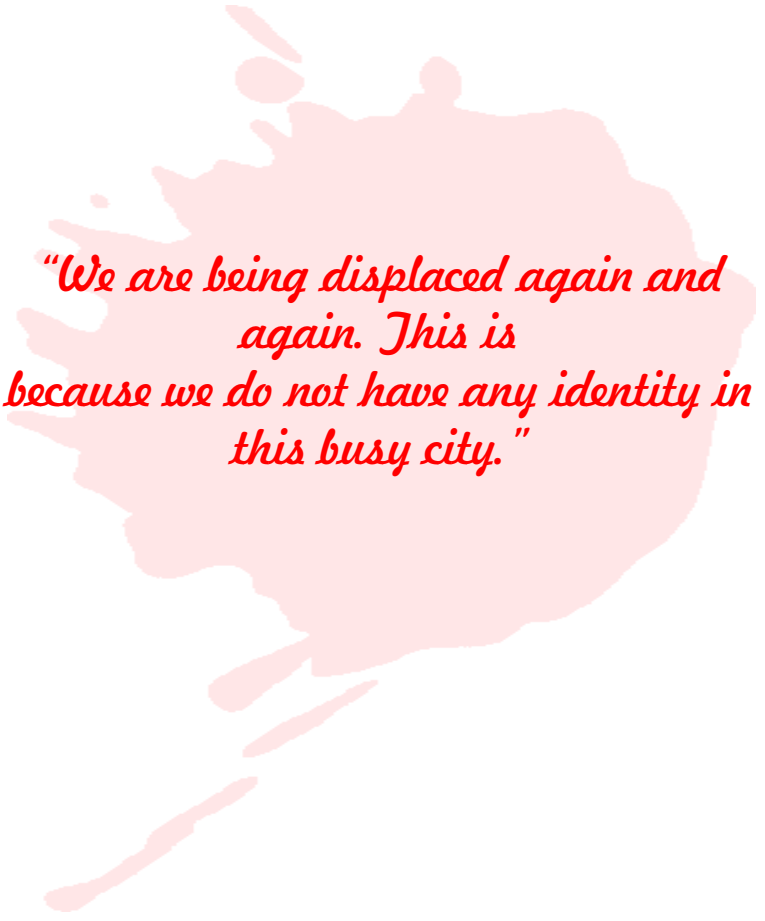
The state plans to have 250 river based dam projects. The people in the state feel this is directly impacting their livelihood, by taking control of water and common resources.

The public meetings saw the issue being raised persistently. The local farmers felt the destruction of farming being caused by the taming of river is not being raised by political parties.

Over 20 organisations actively participated in galvanizing marginalised groups for presenting these issues of destruction of natural resources in the name of development.



Demanding food and dignity



"We are being displaced again and again. This is because we do not have any identity in this busy city."

Ahead of the general elections, the national capital and the neighbouring Punjab saw women from urban poor and land Dalit community reach out to electoral representatives to highlight need for social security and protection of livelihood.

The pre-election conclave in Delhi saw daily wage workers, rag pickers and street vendors speak on the excesses they face due to denial of even basic services in slums that millions live in after being sucked into the urban centres due destruction of livelihoods in rural areas.

The campaign and conclave in Punjab saw demands from landless agricultural and brick kiln workers to end caste based slavery and providing land to Dalit.

Without a roof

The meeting held in Delhi was attended by representatives of the national political parties and like other states here too they did admit that the issues being raised by marginalised people are in need of attention.

"We have been living in constant threat of demolitions of the shanty homes we live in. The so-called resettlements are devoid of drinking water and other basic amenities," said Ganesh Jadhav from a slum.

"We are being displaced again and again. This is because we do not have any identity in this busy city," says Koushalya, echoing the issue of displacement in the cities in the name of facelifts.

Others in the meeting raised the issue of unavailability of government supported food grains meant for poor.

"During elections candidates come to our *jhuggies* and make big promises but once elected they forget people. We want candidates to fulfil their duties," says Parveen from an east Delhi slum settlement.

Land to Dalits

A Dalit women's conference was organised in Punjab's Jalandhar District. Over a thousand participants, including 800 women, attended the meet that marked a culmination point of the campaign that spanned across many districts of Punjab under the aegis of Dalt Dastan Virodhi Andolan (DDVA), a community platform of Dalit people.

Many demanded that a legislation passed in 1961 known as the Village Common Land Act should be used to allot land to Dalit women and families. It allows village council to distribute land to the Scheduled Caste and other poor communities.



Image : Parvinder/ActionAid

Appendix

Demand from various states

Assam

- Give NREGA work to at least 75% of all rural applicants and let at least half of the workforce be women.
- Conduct a social audit of NREGA every three month.
- Increase minimum wage from Rs 66 a day to Rs 100.
- Instate a system of enquiry to check if 100 days of work were indeed offered to villagers.
- Improve implementation of PDS.
- Provide seven kilos of rice to each person every month at Rs 2 per kilo.
- Ensure that all ration shops have rice or wheat flour, sugar, edible oil, pulses and kerosene oil at all times.

Bihar and Jharkhand

- Women should be given total or joint ownership of land and house.
- All women from marginalized communities should be given BPL cards.
- State healthcare services should be made available to all at the village level, with special focus on women.
- Women should be made part of the planning processes so that they also have a say.
- Implementation of economic policies that are destroying peoples' livelihood should be stopped.
- A political platform especially focusing on women demands should be created.

Delhi

- Enactment of Social Security Legislation for unorganized sector workers.
- Implementation of construction workers act.
- No privatization of essential services like health, education, potable water, ESI services to cover labourers in the unorganized sectors.
- PDS: promotion of cooperatives, food entitlements should reach to every family.
- Demand for Urban Employment Guarantee Act.

Hyderabad

- Provide 2.5 acres cultivable land or 5 acres dry land to every landless Dalit woman.
- Ban the Coastal Corridor project and other SEZs.
- Withdraw the proposed Coastal Management Zone Act that would destroy the traditional livelihoods of fishing communities.
- Create a special ministry for weavers separate from the Ministry of Textiles. Give a work shed cum house to every weaver family.
- Ensure appointment of a leader with disability in every village council.
- Grant the children of HIV positive people the right to study in any school and get nutritious food.
- Ratify the Women Reservation Bill that ensures women's participation in legislative bodies.
- Implement the Domestic Violence Prevention Act effectively.
- Free land in tribal areas from non-tribal population and hand over to indigenous communities by implementing the special 1/70 Act.

Himachal Pradesh

- A hundred days of work for all adults under NREGA to be implemented and hike in daily wages to Rs.150
- Ensure ownership of land and house in the name of women on marriage Increase widows pension to Rs.1000 from the current Rs.300
- Dalit women be contracted for cooking meals in schools under mid-day meal schemes
- Acquisition of community resources should be compensated at market rates
- Implementation of tribal and forest dwellers act
- Wine shops will not be opened with consent of women in the village

Maharashtra

- Punishing Violence against women: Including domestic violence, sexual harassment, Action against police officials refusing complaints and not cooperating in the cases under Atrocity Act, Acid Attacks, victims of dowry, immediate implementation of Vishaka Samiti etc.

- Equal Political Representation: immediate passing of women reservation bill in the parliament, 50% reservation for women in Local Self Govt Institutions, Provide security to the elected womens in panchayats and zilla parishads, police reforms with a human rights perspective, Implementation of Sachchar Committee Report etc.
- Right to Livelihood and food security: Like the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme there should be Urban Employment scheme. Equal pay for equal work, Social security for the informal sector workers, raising of BPL limit to 1 lakh, etc.
- Land and property Rights: Equal right to wife on property as husband, housing and employment to be made as fundamental rights, etc.
- Health and Education: Stop privatization of health and education sector, No sexual harassment in school and colleges, stop female feticide, make health and education as fundamental right etc.

Orissa

- Provide land to landless women, with a special focus on single and positive women.
- Housing should be given to women under the state-run Indira Awas Yojana.
- Protect women against domestic violence, particularly positive mothers and single women.
- Provide livelihood generation resources and assets to women.

Punjab

- Implementation of article 23 in the Constitution of India that bans bonded and forced labour.
- Ownership right of houses, animal yards, manure pits, land should be given to woman.
- Maximum employment to women, child care centre and sanitation facilities, a working day should constitute 8 hours and not be liked with progress; account should be open on the name of woman
- State should ban all use of products polluting the rivers, canals, reservoirs, spring fill and ground water.
- State should provide free of cost safe drinking water at the door step.

Rajasthan

- All landless women should be given 5 acres of land.
- The allotment of land by village council should be made to women on a perpetual basis.

- The state pension for widows and old women should be increased from Rs.400 to Rs.1000.
- Make joint registration of property in the name of wife mandatory for legalizing marriages.
- Women's access to communities resources should be made mandatory under the forest law.
- Ensure 50% of jobs under NREGA are reserved for women.

Tamil Nadu

- There should be no Forced Eviction & Displacement in any form.
- Household titles (pattas) should be issued for the women of coastal, dalits, urban poor, muslim women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV/aids and sexual minorities, recognizing their homestead rights.
- There should be no privatization of basic services health care, early child care development, education, public health, transportation, electricity and water facilities.
- All landless agricultural labourers to be provided with 5 acres of land – The titles for the same to be issued in the name of women.
- There should be no implementation of the Coastal Management Zone.
- There should be no implementation of Special Economic Zones in agricultural land and traditional habitats of dalits, tribals, coastal communities.
- Women in the unorganized sector to be provided with Security of labour.

Uttar Pradesh

- Priority to Women, Dalits and other socially excluded groups in the distribution of shelter, land, health and livelihood opportunities.
- Common property rights for women.
- Prevent discrimination against the marginalized in Public Distribution System, Poverty Line and Anganwadi programme.
- Ensure full participation of women in panchayats. Ensure allotment of agricultural land to the poor, landless dalits and women.
- Ensure 100 days of work availability under NREGA instead of 50 days work during financial year 2008-09.
- Provide opportunity of equal education for all and prevent privatization.
- Right of transparency and accountability of the community in all the works of development should through social audits.

Uttarakhand

- In order to preserve environment (rivers, forests and hills), the projects floated for generating hydro electricity that may cause threat to the environment and farming community should be stopped immediately.
- A special policy on water should be enacted and brought into regulation with a provision to protect the interest of the rights of community with respect to water, forest and land.
- Special programmes for water conservation of rain fed rivers by using natural resources.
- Special policies for protection of forests, land and rivers by rehabilitation programmes.
- Prevention of unlimited mining.
- Preventing construction of luxury hotels and resorts on hills for benefit of tourists thus polluting the environment and hampering the traditional livelihoods.
- A special cell in the Parliament should be formed for ensuring development of hills.
- The evaluation report on the impact of dam construction upon environment should be submitted to the disaster management team for developing required strategy and should be shared with the public in order to ensure proper and effective implementation.
- A special committee comprising of members of local community should be formed for evaluating the construction work of dams to be taken care of by the local administration.
- Maximum usage of solar and wind energy should be ensured.
- Protection of basic rights of the farmers and rights upon usage of natural resources should be ensured.

West Bengal

- Women working in unorganised sectors, especially those involved in beedi making and fishing sector, should be given identity cards entitling them to health and social security benefits.
- All landless families should be given land titles under the Bhoomidan Prokolpo for homestead and agricultural purposes.
- In women led households, the land titles should be in their names in other cases a joint ownership should be implemented as a rule.
- Dry and fallow land with the government, and other resources like ponds and lakes, should be provided to women for livelihood generation.

- All urban and rural poor should be included in the BPL list and given ration cards.
- Urban poor in the state, specially the women should have their names in the voter list.
- Housing should be provided to slum dwellers, particularly women, within the city limits.
- Indigenous families should be given ownership of forest and forest land, with special focus on women, under Forest Rights Act 2006.



Image : ActionAid

ActionAid works with poor and excluded people in 24 States in India and over 50 countries worldwide to end poverty and injustice. Together we claim legal, constitutional and moral rights to food and livelihood, shelter, education, healthcare, dignity and a voice in decisions that affect their lives. In India we are supported by some 300 civil society organisations.



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