

Rights First

ActionAid International-India's Newsletter

Reaching the unreachable

“We, the staff members of ActionAid International-India, supported by our partner organisations, have been involved in modest efforts to partner with the poor and excluded communities in India to collectively address poverty, inequity and injustice. Our shared mission is to enable India, and indeed the world, to emerge from poverty, discrimination and injustice, where every person, irrespective of gender, caste, class, age, disability and ethnicity, fully enjoys human rights with dignity.

ActionAid started working in India in the year 1972. Today, more than three decades since we started our journey, we have the privilege of engaging in rights and development action with more than 300 civil society organisations and nearly 5 million poor and excluded people including the *dalits* and indigenous people, various sections of the rural and urban poor, women, children, and minorities. Within these groups, those in vulnerable situations, such as people living with chronic hunger, ill health, migrant and bonded workers, children left out of the education system, urban homeless, trafficked people, people with disabilities, displaced people, refugees and people affected by natural and human-made disasters, are our special focus.

Through the last 34 years, we have formed partnerships with people subjected to social stigma, including sex workers, persons living with HIV and AIDS, manual scavengers, mentally ill people, people in custodial institutions and the de-notified tribes. Excluded and invisibilised, such people find it difficult to enjoy their human rights and emerge from poverty. Our resolve has been to strengthen the voices and agency of these communities to assert for their human rights and dignity.”

— From the ActionAid International-India's Country Strategy Paper 2005

This newsletter is dedicated to share the experiences of our partnerships, the stories of the people with whom we strive each day to realize the basic rights to live with dignity.

This is also an attempt to acknowledge and affirm our faith in collaborations and struggles of the poor and marginalised people in defence of democratic rights. This newsletter will be a co-traveller in the journey of the common people towards realising the dream of an equitable and just society.

Inside



2

**People above profit:
Caravan shows the way**



4

**Kashmir:
Surviving the earthquake**



5

Lessons from the tsunami



6

When women unite ...



20

**Saharias win a
battle**



18

**Education:
For today and
tomorrow**



13

**Beyond the
boundary**



8

**"The fight against
globalisation must be global"**

BBC talks to Babu Mathew

People above profit: Caravan shows the way



Peoples' movements all over the world have challenged the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and demanded that governments put the interests of people above profits.

In the months preceding the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial, on 13-18 December 2005, a strong campaign of common people was launched across Asia. Called the **People's Caravan for Justice, Dignity and Sovereignty 2005**, the initiative brought together people's voices, visions and demands. Twelve countries were involved: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Civil society organisations, trade unionists and thousands of grassroots organisations from these countries decided to march together in protest against the liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) policies.

Since its inception in 1995, the WTO has evolved as an instrument of the developed world to exploit the developing and the least developed countries by de-industrializing them and plundering their resources. The caravan was seen as an effective way to build a cohesive, region-wide strategy to influence the Hong Kong Ministerial. The design and planning of the caravan was deliberately kept polycentric, aimed at involving the common people, giving them the ownership of the process.

The caravan had three aims:

1. To mobilise the poor and the marginalized around the adverse impact of the WTO, the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the LPG policies.
2. To raise voices against the unequal conditions imposed by the WTO and the developed countries on the developing countries.
3. To identify issues of the poor and marginalized and relate them to the policies of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF.

The caravan was a celebration of the collective spirit of the masses. All efforts were made to ensure that the events were colourful and vibrant, and attracted attention. This proved effective: in many places passers by took part spontaneously.

The people's caravan travelled through 22 states of India: 2 crore people participated.

Some issues raised during the people's caravan

The noose around farming: In Anantpur district in Andhra Pradesh, about 10,000 people have lost their lives from the crisis in the agriculture sector, out of which 2115 have committed suicide. This would translate to 44 suicides every week, 6 per day. In

The caravan was seen as an effective way to build a cohesive, region-wide strategy to influence the Hong Kong Ministerial. The design and planning of the caravan was deliberately kept polycentric, aimed at involving the common people

Maharashtra, the government has admitted to more than 1000 farmers' suicides since 2001. The figures in Karnataka are not far behind. In West Bengal the statistics for death due to starvation are equally high. The reasons? Spurious seeds, failed crops and the insurmountable debt burdens.

Storm in the teacup: India produces 60 percent of the world's tea production, providing employment to more than a million people. With globalization, this industry has come under severe threat. There is wide-scale disintegration of small and medium plantations while the transnational companies consolidate their brand names. These global companies purchase tea at the lowest possible price, a lack of transparency marking the entire procedure. In the last couple of years, more than 60,000 people have lost their jobs due to the fall in tea prices and closure of plantations.

Fishy tales: In West Bengal, the export of prawns has been reduced to a miniscule level. Various fishing communities specialize in making fishing nets and other tools and sell them locally but with liberalization, the market is flooded with cheap nets. In Orissa, local made nets are available for Rs 650 but the foreign nets are available for as low a price as Rs 50.

Damn the dams: Dams are a direct cause of large-scale displacement. Most of the time, people are neither rehabilitated nor re-compensated adequately for the loss of their lands and houses. In North-eastern India alone, 168 dams are in the process of being



constructed. People who still remain in the area, have little means to earn their livelihood as they no longer have the right to fish in the river or use its water.

The thirsty drop: In Uttaranchal alone, 8,000 villages do not have easy access to potable drinking water. At the same time, water-bottling plants are established by trans national companies. The very same water is sold to the general public. On an average the price of 1 litre of milk is Rs 9 but the price of bottled water is Rs. 12.

Exiled: Jindal Steels has been trying to acquire lands in almost all Dalit-dominated mine pockets of Jaipur, Dhenkanal and Angul in Orissa. The meetings organized by the Caravan highlighted the fact that these companies were targeting these districts because they are non-scheduled areas and hence not governed by the Panchayats, Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) or the Fifth Schedule. This makes it constitutionally easier for the state government to acquire land and evict dalits and Adivasis from their fertile lands and generations-old homes, without having to go through the charade of providing compensation.

Battling the axe: In Chattisgarh the forest department started marking around 87,000 trees for cutting. This was first brought to notice by Meruram, an elderly person who felt that they would be ruined if the forest is destroyed. People's groups, including women and children, kept vigil against tree markings around their villages. There were false cases filed against 135 people in the villages to put a stop to this resistance.

Takeovers: Local Jappi (bamboo hat worn in the north-east) makers in Assam are facing an uncertain future as the markets are taken over by the cheap plastic raincoats.



Capital punishment: Recently, the World Bank and the state Government tried to privatize water in Delhi, promising constant water supply 24/7. However they failed to mention that after privatization water will become a saleable commodity, and the public will not have control over ground water. Community taps and hand pumps will become a thing of past. Privatization also invariably means that the price of water will rise. People who have no money will have no access to water, driving the poor to the peril of death.

The public sector in jeopardy: With the privatization of banks and finance sector, it is the rural India that suffers the most. In the absence of cooperative banking or other credit facilities, farmers resort to the local moneylenders who charge high interest rates and are unpredictable enough to demand their money back at short notice. Privatization will also have an impact on Nagar Nigams and Municipal Corporations who till now have been responsible for sanitation and

sewage. Mostly Dalits and the so called lower caste are engaged in these vital activities.

All work and no pay: Across the board, women are paid lesser than men. In the Himalayan region, it is estimated that a pair of oxen work 1064 hours in a year per hectare; a man would work 1212 hrs while a woman would put in 3486 hrs of work.

The second class citizens: It is estimated that there are thousands of homeless women in the Delhi region alone, practically living on the pavements. These women report constant molestation and sexual harassment at the hands of the police and others.

The list does not end here. The journey against globalisation and WTO is continuing through different modes of struggle, gathering strength through the streets and alleys of the real India — the India that lives in the villages and small towns, in slum settlements and on the streets.



Kashmir: Surviving the earthquake



Cash for work programme in an earthquake hit area in Kashmir

The eighth of April marks six months since a devastating earthquake hit Kashmir on October 8, 2005. Even as Kashmir was struggling with a state of turmoil, the earthquake brought untold miseries upon a people totally unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude. Most Kashmiris invest the most in houses. In cold climes, this is a necessity-driven investment. The poorest borrow and often end up as bonded labour to build a house. The loss of a living space was therefore directly linked to survival rights of the Kashmiris, who were faced with the prospect of spending the impending winter without shelter.

Since ActionAid has already been working in Kashmir for some years now, we could rush in with food and essential relief in the first week after the quake itself. Food and supplement kits were provided to hundreds of families, mainly those headed by widows, to help them live through the winter. The survivors desperately needed tents, which we sourced with great difficulty from the markets outside Kashmir. We tried our best to get temporary shelters erected well before the first snowfall.

Food security and cold-related health complications, lack of access to health care facilities and logistical problems for NGOs in carrying out relief and rehabilitation activities due to heavy snow hampered the work to a large extent.

As soon as the roads were cleared of snow in late January, we undertook a number of activities aimed at reconstruction and restoration of 30 earthquake-affected villages, including a large-scale cash for work programme. ActionAid has also released a comprehensive damage assessment report prepared with support from the University of Kashmir and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, detailing the extent of damage in the earthquake areas. The report is a precursor to a larger household report under preparation now.

For improving sanitation conditions, 140 toilet units will be set up in six villages by the end of April. So far, 25 medical camps have also been conducted, reaching out to 3544 people. Back-to-school activities undertaken in temporary school structures have been undertaken in 12 villages so far, with local women employed as teachers.

In the cash for work programme, people have been involved in clearing roads left in rubble after massive landslides, as well as planting apple trees, mainly on degraded lands. In many places, essential repair work is also being carried out under the cash for work programme. For instance, in Nowgam, Baramulla, a 40 feet long embankment that was damaged in the quake has been rebuilt along a stream. In Sultanpora, Baramulla, 3 damaged houses belonging to women-headed households were repaired.

The cash for work programme brought in a much-needed succour for households left without a source of income. We selected the remotest villages to work in, places where options for alternate sources of income were the least. The apple trees planted under the programme double up as a long-term income generating opportunity, since these areas are major suppliers of apples nationally as well as internationally.

The reconstruction efforts are just begun, but six months on, we can safely say that, the most vulnerable are assured of their basics right to survival in the villages we are working in.

(Based on reports from Kashmir)

Lessons from the tsunami

Vishwat V

As far as world disasters go, the tsunami was one of the most significant. Millions of dollars worth aid poured in. It also started a debate on the best ways to reach the poorest in a fishing economy.

Many organisations moved in to help rebuild lives. Five hundred days on from the tsunami, important issues related to the fishing economy still remain untouched. Are these myriad agencies really addressing poverty at the ground level? As a development professional, my experiences are mixed.

To a certain extent, the poor have been helped in overcoming distress. But many structural issues remained untouched.

Middlemen and the fishing industry

To take a case in point, exploitation by middlemen continues in the average fishing village. The middleman enters into 3 to 4 year agreements with fisherfolk, by fixing a price for the entire period. While each catch goes to the middleman at this

previously agreed upon price, a fraction of the market price, the final sale price of the catch is something beyond the imagination of the poor fisherman who had battled with the elements to get the catch. Caught thus in a debt trap, the fisherfolk continue to languish in poverty, while the middlemen rake in the moolah. Most of the boat owners are thus 'tied' to the middlemen-moneylender, reeling under interest rates as high as 36% - preposterous by the standards of even private banks in the country.

Even worse off are the fish workers who work as daily wagers on the bigger boats. All they make is about Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 per day, depending on the catch. As part of the informal sector, they do not get any income when there is no catch.

These two grades in the informal sector, one only marginally better off than the other, need formal organisation that can safeguard them against exploitation and get them their dues.

The unreached people

A sizeable number of fibre boats were 'dumped' in the fishing villages, so to

speak, without consulting the communities on the possibly deleterious side effects, such as the environmental effects. Others who are very much part of the fishing economy, such as vendors, rickshaw pullers, and casual beach workers, have received almost no benefits, as organisations compete to realise their planned budgets.

Environmental issues

Licenses to foreign vessels are proving disastrous for the marine ecology, as these vessels sweep the seabed with finer nets that deplete the fishing resources, in utter violation of the Marine Fishing Regulatory Act in India. State governments, such as the Government of Andhra Pradesh, are using the tsunami as an opportunity to push large infrastructure projects.

The real need

The need of the hour, clearly, is to mobilise the civil society organisations to create political pressure on the government and the multinationals. This remains with us as a lesson for other disasters as well.



When women unite...

ActionAid is committed to work together to end poverty and patriarchy, affirms the organisation's strategy paper. Below are some glimpses from various struggles from across the country, struggles that ActionAid is proud to be part of

In 230 villages in Koriya, a district in Chhattisgarh, women community leaders, or *Mitanins*, are bringing about a sea change in the way the community looks at health, especially reproductive health issues. The *Mitanins* of Chhattisgarh are leaders in their hamlets' watchdog or *Dekh Rek* Committees that raise rights issues in favour of the poorest. Till date, the *Mitanins* have several positive changes at the community level to their credit.

In a matter of a few years, all 230 villages now have community health workers to provide basic and referral health services in areas that are otherwise untouched by the state's health safety net. Teacher absenteeism, a wide scale problem in the district have also been the target of the *Mitanins*.

Elsewhere, the *Musabar* women of Kushinagar district in Uttar Pradesh, perceived to be the 'lowest' among Dalits, have handed over a charter of demands to the District Magistrate. The charter asks for real benefits to be brought to the doorsteps of the *Musabar* community, who have long been subjected to empty promises. One of the significant demands is that priority be given to women in getting work under the Food for Work scheme. Women should also have registered ownership of lands, both agricultural and homestead land. Cases of violence against women must be dealt with promptly by the administration. Government schemes for pre-school children must reach each *Musabar* settlement and arrangements must be made such that *Musabar* girls get an education. *Musabar* women, says the

Charter, should have a priority in accessing social security schemes and Government entitlements, and that women leaders in local governance structures be given administrative support.

In Orissa, the Chief Minister had issued an order to open 2000 alcohol shops in villages to boost Government revenues. Several women's groups protested, terming the move anti-poor and against the interests of women. When men start spending on alcohol, the household budget often falls in serious jeopardy. The protests from the women's groups finally led to the Government withdrawing the order.

In Rajasthan and Maharashtra, ActionAid is working with elected women members



of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The focus is on building capacities to enable them to promote women's interests and work towards ensuring accountability and transparency in governance.

Women participated in large numbers in the People's Caravan for Justice, Dignity and Sovereignty in protest of the WTO's antiwomen policies. They drew attention to issues such as exclusion of women from the labour market, loss of indigenous seeds, and violence in the workplace including sexual harassment. Sex workers in West Bengal, for instance, demanded the inclusion of their profession in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATTS).

The Consult for Women and Land Rights (CWLR) brought together different streams of focus on the issue of land rights for women. The CWLR is a platform of 20 organisations and networks across India and advocates on the issue at local, national and international levels. Policy advocacy by the CWLR has resulted in some important initiatives, helped by the amendments to the Hindu Succession Act. The Department of Women and Child Development has asked all state governments to report on the issue of women and land rights. Talks are on to initiate a scheme to promote group landholdings for women. The National Commission on Women (NCW) decided to conduct a series of public hearings on the issue across the country: Two such hearings have already been conducted in 2005. Also, the national Planning Commission has asked the CWLR to help in incorporating a women and land reforms programme into the 11th Plan document. The CWLR now has a membership base in 8 countries and has successfully brought up the issues of women and land rights into the Beijing +10 discussions as well as during the World Food Summit.

Violence against women

The International Fortnight to End Violence Against Women in 2004 turned into a huge show of strength from people all over the country. In Gujarat, a widespread campaign covering as many as 4283 villages, town and cities used a variety of methods to raise awareness. By

the end of this, a state-wide network called the '*Kanya Ani Stree Hinsa Virodhi Abhiyaan*' or the 'campaign to end violence against girls and women' was formed.

In Bihar, the campaign took the form of public meets, poster competitions and plays across 10 districts. The campaign was organized by the *Mabila Adhikar Morcha*, a network of 17 organisations and individual activists. In Ranchi, Jharkhand, a special convention where 400 adolescent girls participated in a *Kishori Samsad* or parliament of adolescent girls saw the symbolic passing of the Domestic Violence Bill.

In Karnataka, seven NGOs and several community-based organizations have come together to form

a network on violence against women. The network has helped set up action groups in villages to deal with such incidents. Survivors have also come together to form solidarity groups to share experiences and support each other. In the Bidar district of Karnataka, such a district level federation is called *Mabima*. The network provides much needed legal support to women. Community courts, called *nyaya chowdies* run by women are another innovation. It has helped raise awareness on the Domestic Violence Bill too. Significantly for the women's movements, the Domestic Violence Act, a quasi-civil legislation on domestic violence was also passed by the Parliament in 2005. Members of the judiciary, police and local government functionaries have also been sensitized.

The *Dekh Rekha samitis* mentioned before have also played significant roles in monitoring domestic violence and setting up community mechanisms to deal with such incidents. In many places, the incidence of domestic violence have come down because of the presence of these committees.

In West Bengal, a skill building programme for women community and social workers called the Rapid Response Training has been introduced to help them respond fast to cases of domestic and other kinds of violence.

Economic empowerment

Women in the Dhemaji district of Assam have deliberately circumvented traders' and middlemen's control on the local

economy by setting up rural markets independently. These markets, called 'Amaar Bazaars' or 'my markets' have started gaining recognition and legitimacy with the district authorities, with the active support of the local communities.

Women in the fishing sector, whose work and contributions are invisibilised, (like those in the agricultural sector) since they are mostly involved in post-processing work, were the special focus of ActionAid's tsunami response programme. Savings and credit groups have been set up for and with women in the disaster-hit communities.

Sex workers in Andhra Pradesh have started accessing government funds to explore different livelihood options.

Across the borders

Working with the paramilitary forces in India and Bangladesh - the Bangladesh Rifles and the Border Security Force - ActionAid has succeeded in repatriating trafficked girls and women back home. The premise that we have worked on is that trafficked women and girls are victims of cross-border traffickers and not 'illegal aliens'.

Cementing this tie within the organization among colleagues in ActionAid India and ActionAid Bangladesh, trainers have worked to promote REFLECT circles (a tool to build learning communities) to discuss issues such as problems faced by women with disabilities, violence against women and the rights of sex workers.

We have also tried to hold hands across the borders by participating in international seminars such as the 10th AWID International Forum called 'How Does Change Happen?'

Focussing on the most vulnerable

Within the larger community we work with, our aim is to identify problems of the most marginalized, towards change. In Andhra Pradesh, campaigns are on in 8 schools to stop discrimination against girls in school. HIV positive women, who face discrimination and rights violations in almost every sphere, be it public or private, are also a special group for us. Six HIV-positive women are getting ActionAid fellowships to promote the organization of Positive women.

Behind all these, is a continuous engagement and commitment to improve our own capacities and understanding of gender issues, such that real equity is made possible for the women of India.

"The fight against globalisation must be global"

Leading anti-poverty campaigner and ActionAid International-India's Country Director Professor Babu Mathew speaks to Zeena Badawi of the BBC on Hardtalk

Zeena Badawi: Babu Mathew, welcome to Hard talk. By and large, would you say that economic globalization is a good or bad thing for the poor in India?

Babu: I think it's difficult to make a sweeping generalization. Globalisation of the variety that we are now witnessing is certainly doing a lot of damage to the poor.

Zeena: What do you mean by that?

Babu: If I straightaway go to the Indian context, then I must say that during the past few years, destitution in India has tremendously increased. Destitution, especially among the excluded groups. By excluded groups, I mean the 'untouchables', those who are called as the *Dalits*, the tribals or the indigenous people, the Muslims, the most backward communities, the informal sector...

Zeena: And you blame globalization for that?

Babu: Yes, globalization has unfortunately...

Zeena: But they have always been discriminated against, if you look at the history of India's past...

Babu: Yes, social discrimination has always been there. I am not attributing that to globalization. But I am talking of their livelihood. Increasingly, they are being deprived of their livelihood.

Zeena: But isn't that simply a direct result of the fact that socially and culturally, for centuries, they have been marginalized in India because of the very rigid caste structure?

Babu: Sure, the caste system has aggravated their condition. But let's say, most of the dalits are also agricultural labourers. In the past, they used to have enough working days. But now the number of days on which they get employment is getting reduced. The minimum wages are in jeopardy, and they are forced to leave their villages and migrate in search of work.

Zeena: And in what ways has globalization caused that?

Babu: It has opened up doors to all kinds of exploitation. The natural resources and mineral wealth of India, for instance, are being plundered in an unprecedented manner. Take the indigenous people. They are completely excluded and displaced from their original habitations.

Zeena: But when you see the terrific rates of growth that India has enjoyed and how so many cities and places in India are booming, that's a direct result of globalization?

Babu: That's true, and I think for that reason we must differentiate

between India and Bharat. On the one hand you have prosperity for the elite and on the other hand you have increasing levels of deprivation for those who are in the villages and on the fringes of society.

Zeena: But when you hear what one of the world's leading experts on globalization, Professor Jagadish Bhagawati, says, that we need to abandon the conviction that globalization lacks a human face...

Babu: I am not convinced that globalization really has a human face. I find that increasingly that those who are displaced are treated with cruelty. In fact, some time back, in the state of Orissa, the police fired and killed fourteen tribals. And that's not the human face (of the system)!

Zeena: But you are just talking about the downsides to globalization, and most people would agree with you on that, but it doesn't mean that you therefore have to say that globalization is bad. To use an analogy, it is a bit like cutting off your water supply to handle an occasional dripping tap.

Babu: Yes, I agree that there can be positive forms of globalization, but what we are now witnessing is not that. It is what is called the Washington Consensus model. I am sure the new world would require a form of international relations which should be just.

Zeena: Well, let's just go through the steps then. The Asian Development Bank has looked at the figures and it says that the economic growth figures in India have happened as a direct result of the Indian Governments', since the 1980s, more in the 1990s opening up the Indian economy to the world. You see that in 1978 poverty levels in India were 51% of the population. By 2000, they dropped to 26%. You cannot deny that therefore, poverty is linked to economic growth.

Babu: I am glad that you have picked on the poverty figures. It's interesting to note that while the Government of India is talking about 26% below the poverty line, if we examine that carefully, we find that it's the result of manipulation. Statistically, it appears to be valid. But the concepts that are used for the calculation of poverty have been distorted. What I mean is the calorific content of human consumption. In the 1950s, Dr. Aykroyd, who was a renowned nutrition expert, said that an adult Indian of average height and moderate activity, requires 2,750 calories of food. The Government of India has reduced that to 2,400, 2100, and now it's nearly 1,700.

Zeena: The calculations are based on a dollar a day, and that's what is recognized internationally...

Babu: Yes, if it were to be a dollar a day, it would not be 26%. The equivalent of the calorific content that they are taking into

consideration works out to 25 cents.

Zeena: So how many people? 26% is a quarter of a billion people the Government says is living in poverty. What's your figure, then?

Babu: I think it would be nearly half the population of India.

Zeena: Alright, but the fact is, it still doesn't detract from the point the Asian Development Bank is making: that there has been a reduction in poverty levels as a direct result of economic growth. When you look at one of the main engines of economic growth, and by and large all economists will accept this: trade is a very significant factor. I mean, are you fearful of India opening up its markets to more international trade?

Babu: No, we are not fearful. But I think that trade must be fair trade. Our experience has been that in the name of asking India to open up, a number of unfair conditions are imposed. I don't think the World Trade Organisation, in reality, has a concept of fair trade. What they impose upon us is their own notion of it. In fact, they are not even truthful to their own philosophy. According to the philosophy of the World Trade Organisation, there ought to have been a level playing ground. Instead, you have subsidies galore given to agriculture in Europe...

Zeena: The debate is so much, as you put it, that all the rich have got all these agricultural subsidies, though there isn't any protectionism or food subsidies in the poorer countries. Take India: you've got 20% average tariff on imports, you have these soaring food subsidies... I mean one figure says that it takes 6.5 rupees cost of transport to transport one rupee worth of food to poor people in India. That's unconscionable, isn't it?

Babu: Well, you see, we are able to take care of our starvation thanks to the public distribution system in India. And that is because the Food Corporation of India has been able to gather the grains from within the country, based upon a remunerative price. What the World Trade Organisation says is that there should be no support to the Indian farmer.

Zeena: But you've got inefficient subsidies, just as countries in the richer world have too.

Babu: There is scope for improving the public distribution system, but there is no reason why that should be abandoned.

Zeena: So you are arguing for one rule for poorer countries like India, and a different one for the richer countries?

Babu: I am saying that if the richer countries insist and continue to pay huge subsidies, they have no moral right to ask India to stop giving subsidies to agriculture.

Zeena: What they are asking for is this: the rich countries are saying, okay, we'll remove our tariffs and our subsidies, if you, India, for example, open up your markets to our imports, our industrialized goods, our services, our retail sector. I mean that sounds like a pretty fair quid pro quo, doesn't it?

Babu: Well, that's what they say in theory, but the truth is that they are saying, by 2013, we will think in terms of reducing agricultural subsidies in Europe and America.

Zeena: But as a principle, isn't that fair that they should say that we'll do this if you do that, no matter when it's going to happen.

Babu: Yes, as a principle, if you have a total package which is based upon the principle of just trade, we would welcome it. But I don't think that's what is happening. It's unjust trade. They have the dominant position and their own terms and conditions are sought to be showered upon us.

Zeena: But in what way is it an unjust trade? Just illustrate for us how it actually manifests itself with the people you work with, in India.

Babu: Well, you know, a lot of people in India live in a subsistence economy. For example, there are various varieties of cereal, which are native kinds of food products. Now if there are food imports from abroad, these crops will disappear. And then the ordinary people will not be able to live. As it is, there is increasing deaths on account of starvation, not to

mention malnutrition.

Zeena: But can't you just accept that actually, sadly, some people will lose their jobs, but there are other people who get jobs, and so long as the Government in India has a safety net, employment, health insurance, free training for these people, they can deal with this impact of globalization. I mean that's what happens in the rich world.

Babu: It's true that there has been some employment created in certain sectors of the Indian economy. But there's been a huge loss of employment in other sectors. And on balance, we find that there is greater loss than gain. And it is this aspect which the Government should be able to take care of. You see, those countries which have rejected such conditionalities, such as those of the International Monetary Fund, they are doing well. Argentina is one example. East Asia is another. So I think there is the crisis-driven model and the strategy-driven model to structural change. And India has fallen into the crisis-driven one.

Zeena: But you are still saying, despite all this, that you are against globalization. And the point I am putting to you is that perhaps it is not globalization per se that's to blame, and that if you mitigate the downside of globalization by having the retraining programmes and all the rest of it, actually globalization is a good thing for India.

Babu: Yes, as I said earlier, globalization of this variety is what we are opposed to. And I repeat, this is the Washington Consensus model of globalization, where a number of conditionalities are attached in advance. When a loan is given to us, then conditions are laid down, and it is those conditions that prevent India from acting in a sovereign way. The Finance Ministry of India is no longer able to plan on its own. It listens more to advice from abroad. And we have competent economists from within our own country. We would like to plan our own future. We don't need to be told from outside as to how to run our economy. It is that freedom and sovereignty which is being eroded.

Zeena: But India would say that it does have its sovereignty. I just want to clarify with you. So you are saying that there is nothing wrong with people perhaps moving from the agricultural sector and trying to get jobs in an expanding industry or manufacturing, as we have seen the burgeoning middle class in India is doing.

"...we must differentiate between India and Bharat. On the one hand you have prosperity for the elite and on the other hand you have increasing levels of deprivation for those who are in the villages and on the fringes of society."



Babu: Yes, we would welcome people moving from agriculture to industry and from industry to the service sector. But in fact, what is happening is that there is no additional employment being created in industry. It's not on a sufficiently large scale as to take care of those who are being displaced.

Zeena: You need investment, don't you, for that?

Babu: Yes, we welcome investment.

Zeena: Would you welcome investment from abroad, foreign direct investment?

Babu: Yes, we would welcome investment if that's a type of investment that helps the Indian economy to grow. If it's a type of investment that destroys existing employment, and makes us permanently technologically subordinate, we would question that.

Zeena : Well let's see what kind of investment, because you see, as the Finance Minister, P Chidambaram has said that in India there is a phobia about foreign money coming into India. He says, people ought to be colour blind about money, money is money, wherever it comes from. You think he's right on that?

Babu: It's not the colour of money, it's the conditions attached to the money, its what money brings along with it, in terms of the type of economic philosophy behind it. In terms of the models that it is importing. Don't forget that India had a very large mixed economy, a mixed economy in which the public sector and the private sector had a role. We had planning as well as market forces operating. Now we are told, subordinate yourself entirely, only to the market forces.

Zeena: Alright, well the Government, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Finance Minister are trying to liberalise the Indian economy. For example in the retail sector, they do want to open it up to the big international players. Is that something that you think is good? Do you like that?

Babu: No, I don't think so. Because there's a huge segment of the Indian population that is dependant upon the type of commodity production and distribution we have at the moment. There are large numbers of petty businessmen, into petty commodity production. So it's not only those businessmen, but the type of economy that supports those businesses. If you have modern businesses from abroad coming, they will set up their own economy, which is essentially not labour-intensive. So there will be additional unemployment created.

Zeena: But wouldn't consumers benefit?

Babu: A certain section of the consumers will. The elite in India will benefit. They would welcome it. They like more of these.

Zeena: But the producers: I mean these big retailers are going to need textiles, they are going to need whatever India can produce. They need raw materials not only for the retail outlets in India, but also for their market support. They are a win-win situation for India.

Babu : No, but if you look at the type of commodities that are sold in the Indian markets, these are not manufactured commodities of the European or American standards. There is a parallel economy in India, which is really an economy that is based in the villages. And those products get sold through the existing market mechanism. If you bring in the retail, all of them will be replaced by a multinational company.

Zeena: Why can't the two coexist? I mean isn't it true that the rural households producing soap for people in rural areas, while people in cities might want the international brands?

Babu: As of now, there is a certain co-existence. For example, there are, the various manufactured garments that are already in India. And the middle classes accessing that. We are not talking about that just now. When you talk of opening up the retail market, it is the entire gamut of commodities that are necessary in the Indian economy.

Zeena: Let me just tell you what the West Bengal Chief Minister Bhattacharya has said, because he is very keen, he's banging the drum, isn't he, for inward investment from abroad? He says, if we can't reform and perform, we will perish. We cannot follow North Korea and stick to dogmas.

Babu: Yes, West Bengal is one of those extraordinarily different situations of India.

Zeena: And what he says is extraordinary for a senior communist leader.

Babu: It is, it is. And that's because they are tremendously influenced by the experience of the Chinese. Not only influenced,

they have also implemented land reforms. There are only two states in India which have implemented land reforms, Kerala and West Bengal. So that has already created a different economy. There is a lot of protection which is already afforded. Don't forget that West Bengal has the highest foodgrain productivity in India after the North-East.

Zeena: But the fact that a senior communist leader can speak like this: do you get a sense then that the debate

about globalization is shifting? Because there are a few like Pradip Mehta, who works a great deal on international trade and consumer groups in India, recognized as a leading authority on this, and he says the debate in India about globalization is very much based on the myths and misunderstandings. And there is a great deal of skepticism which is not justified.

Babu: Well that's the view of one set of scholars. There are other scholars in India like Deepak Nayyar, the former Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, and he has demonstrated how India would do much better if it were to follow the South East Asian model, for example. And that is where we accept globalization in a selective manner. We make sure there is a strategy behind our development. China has a strategy while it is relating with globalization. And India, which had much more experience than China in a mixed economy, is unfortunately surrendering entirely to the Washington Consensus.

Zeena: You are talking about the Washington Consensus. Although people are now talking about the post-Washington Consensus, but that's another debate. But the point is, why there is this skepticism. Let's explore with you, why there is, people say, a kind of skepticism about globalization, it's impact, among people in India?

Babu: I think there are the economists who see only the dimension of the elite. And there are economists in India who look at the dimension of those who are excluded.

Zeena: But it's not just economists. It's the press, it's people as well.

Babu: Yes, the intellectual opinion is reflected in the media. And therefore even within the media there is this difference of opinion, fortunately. And that's the strength of the Indian democracy. So every single economic measure that is taken by the Government comes under public and intellectual scrutiny of a high order. And that's the reason why there is enough material to challenge this model of development.

Zeena: And how do you see India reconciling all these tension? We all know about the growing middle class and yet you talk about this pool of poverty which is much greater than the government is acknowledging.

Babu: Yes, I think that's where the whole question of listening to the voice of the poor people becomes important. You know, the Constitution of India is a very unique document, perhaps the only one of its kind in the world. It is a Constitution which guarantees basic needs of the people and through judicial intervention, these have become fundamental rights. So we have the fundamental right to education, to health, to shelter, to earn your living. As a result of all this, we have an opportunity to try another kind of an experiment. And that is the reason why there is so much tension in India.

Zeena: What is the experiment? What is the tension about? Is it about those who want to close India and those who want to open it and integrate it more?

Babu: No, that's only one dimension. There is this other dimension that even within the existing economy, people should be guaranteed the right to have an education. Our Government schools must be made to function. We have 700,000 public schools in India. These schools are not working (fully). They must be made to function (fully), only then the poor have a chance. Similarly, in relation to health, in relation to housing, in relation to clothing. So the excluded communities have started now articulating their voice. How do you give them full citizenship?

Zeena: So in order to improve poverty situations, looking at the British Department for International Development, it says that

states with high levels of literacy and rights for women, like Kerala, have been states which have been most successful in reducing poverty. Is that the key, then, do you think?

Babu: That's true, that's true.

Zeena: And then that's got nothing to do with globalization, has it? The right to education, is the responsibility of India, at the federal, and state level, more importantly.

Babu: That's true. But there is an effort to try and interfere even in that. If you question budgetary allocation for the service sector, for the education sector, if you try and interfere with that, and say, look, there should not be deficit financing.

Zeena: But the Government is saying, we want to spend more, on health and education, but they are saying we would be accused of being fiscally irresponsible, we've got to get the money from somewhere, and that's where they look to the global economy, to trade, to foreign direct investment, that's where the money's going to have to come from.

Babu: Yes if the Government were to allocate money from its budget for these basic needs, we would be the first to welcome it. Unfortunately, it is other institutions from abroad which are giving the money for education. We consider that dangerous. There will come a day when they will suddenly withdraw. And then the whole experiment will collapse. There must be a minimum allocation for social sector spending. And that should include the basic needs.

Zeena: And there, when you try and help the poor people in India, your efforts must be directed much more to your own national Governments, rather than pursuing your international campaign.

Babu: Definitely. I don't agree with you that there is no link between the international campaign and the national interests. Globalisation is global and therefore the fight against globalization, seeking justice, must also be global. Of course, it must be rooted in our soil.

Zeena: Professor Babu Matthew, thank you for coming on Hardtalk.

The song of a mountain dreamer

*It doesn't interest me what you do for a living,
I want to know what you ache for,
and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing,
It doesn't interest me how old you are.*

*I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love,
for your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.
It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.*

*I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow,
if you have been opened by life's betrayals or
have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain!*

*I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,
Without moving to hide it or fix it.*

*I want to know if you can be with joy, mine and your own,
if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you
to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be
careful,
It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.*

*I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself.
if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your
own soul.*

*I want to know if you can be faithful and therefore the trustworthy.
I want to know if you can see beauty even when it is not pretty
everyday,
and if you can source your life from eternal presence.*

*I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine,
and still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the silver of
the full moon, "Yes!"*

*It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money
you have.*

*I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair,
weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done
for the children.*

It doesn't interest me who you are, how you came to be here.

*I want to know if you will stand in the centre of the Fire with
me and not shrink back.*

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.

*I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else
falls away.*

*I want to know if you can be alone with yourself;
and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.*

Fisherfolk protest a killing

ActionAid launched a campaign along the south east coast of India On 28th March 2006 following the brutal killing of a fisherman involved in protests against a controversial port development.

Mr Chodipilli Nooka Raju, 37, was hit by bullets and died on the spot when police opened fire on people protesting outside the port construction site in the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Thirty six people were hospitalized with bullet injuries, including a woman who remains in a critical condition.

Sited at Gangavaram, a place valued for its deep water, highly conducive to fishing, the port development threatens the livelihoods of thousands of families still struggling to recover from the 2004 tsunami. In recent weeks, the fishing community stepped up protests with dances, songs and the delivery of a petition. Demonstrations had passed off peacefully until March 27 when the police used tear gas and turned their guns on protestors.

Funding for the port, which is designed for use by large fishing trawlers, comes through a public-private partnership

scheme worth 623 million dollars. In February 2005, less than two months after the giant waves wreaked havoc along the coast, the Andhra Pradesh government gave the go-ahead for construction. Fishing families who have lived in the area for generations say the development could mean the end of their way of life.

"We are only just getting back on our feet after the tsunami," says Korlayya, who lives in Gangavaram village and has fished in the waters there all his life, "but this port could push us out from our water. It will destroy us."

"My wife and I, my parents and their parents before them, all raised families here by fishing carefully. We use small boats, we don't fish during the breeding season and we don't take too much. Those trawlers just eat up everything in their path," he adds.

Some 3600 families in Gangavaram rely on fishing for their living either fishing in small boats or processing and selling the fish that is caught. The fishing community says that neither the government nor the port authorities made any attempt to consult them about the planned changes. They say that the government's proposal to build a new

jetty for small boats at Yerada nearby simply won't work.

ActionAid is working with fishing networks and women's organizations to support families in demanding a proper rehabilitation package that includes compensation payments and a new jetty in the deep water of Gangavaram to land their boats.

The campaign which spans India's south east coast began on 28 March with a demonstration of solidarity on Marina Beach in Chennai.

"I don't not know where Andhra Pradesh is, but I know that the police should not kill people like this," says 15 years old Dheeraj. He sells cotton candy on Marina beach, Chennai. "I come from Madhya Pradesh and have seen police beating my villagers too," he adds. Dheeraj signed the petition and returned half an hour later with 30 more cotton candy sellers who wanted to understand what is going on in Gangavaram.

Fishing federation leaders, students, local residents, journalists and young tribal representatives from the Andaman and Nicobar islands all look part in the gathering.

Over 700 signatures of support were collected as the ActionAid team walked the beach talking with people about recent events. The petition was sent to the President and government officials requesting them to take action.

"Don't bother explaining the idea of this meeting to me, just give me the pen and I will sign for you," said an ice cream vendor. "I was a fisherman once and because of poor earnings I have been forced to get into this work."

As for software engineer Asif, the information was a shock. Strolling on the beach with his wife, when our team member walked up and asked for their signature after explaining the purpose, Asif admitted his ignorance and lack of interest for such issues. "My urban view of life, I guess, is a disadvantage." Asif and his wife signed the petition.



Beyond the boundary

“How else exit madness except by recognizing reason(s)?”

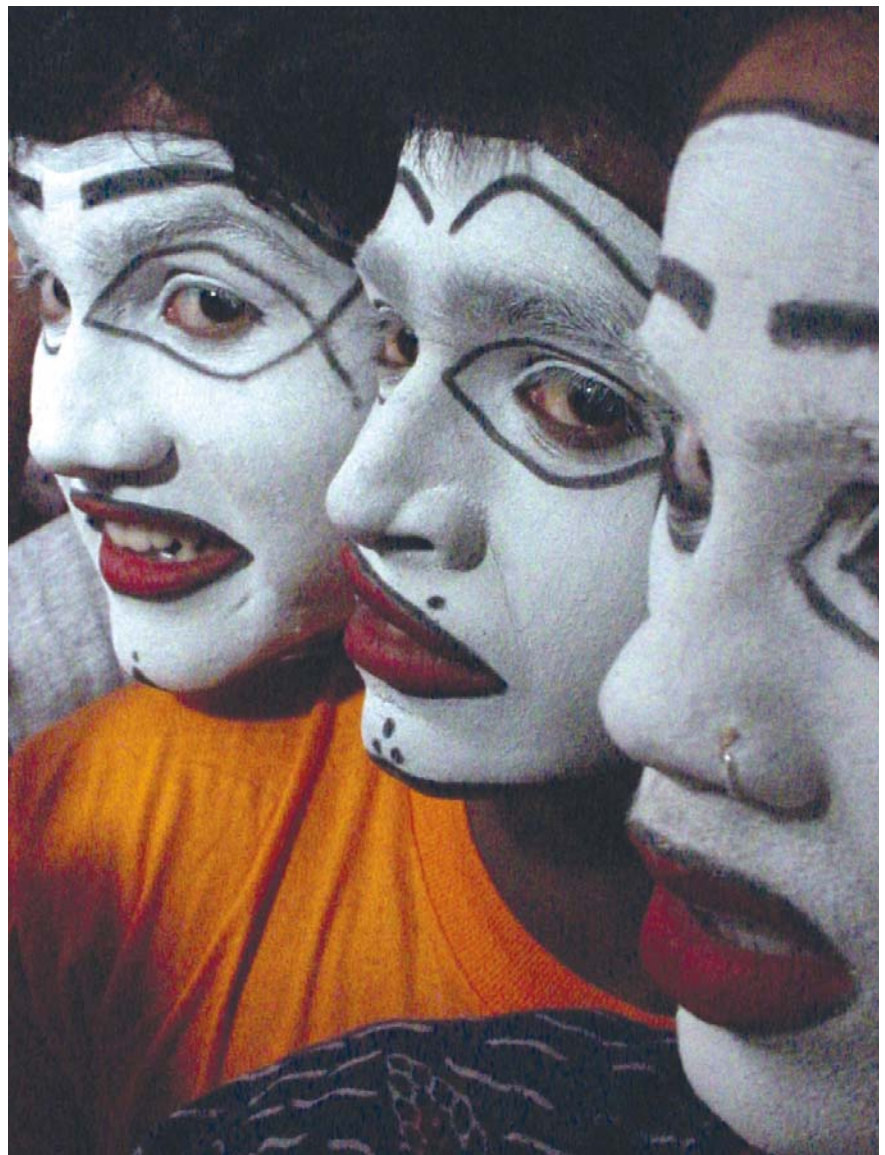
- Franco Rotelli (1998), Trieste, Italy

Dr. Ramani Sundaresan, a medical doctor and leading psychotherapist and head of the ActionAid-National Human Rights Commission's collaborative initiative 'Maitri', discusses the ways in which mental health patients can get their due in terms of living a life of dignity, care and hope. As the project completes three and a half years, the article takes a bird's eye view of the problem, the larger concern for de-custodialising mental health care, as well as a look at what *Maitri* has done so far.

Mental illness has for long been a subject of fear and discrimination. In a most bizarre incident 5 years ago, on August 7, 2001, 27 mentally ill persons were charred to death while chained to pillars near a religious shrine in Ramnad district of Tamil Nadu.

A census of patients in 36 state-run mental hospitals in India revealed that about half of those admitted to these hospitals have been incarcerated there for long terms. In actual terms, the census showed that about 8000 people had been staying in these hospitals for 5-25 years. Of them, there are a few who have spent entire lifetimes in the mental hospitals.

The population of long stay patients has been categorized variously, according to degree of psychiatric disability and circumstance of long stay. Each hospital has different criteria about who should be put in the list of 'manageable', 'fit for rehabilitation' as opposed to 'chronic' or 'untreatable'. Broadly, however, 'chronic mental patients' is a category comprising those people that psychiatrists believe have become resistant to medical treatment. This group is not only psychiatrically but even otherwise disabled as a result of long years of illness and side effects of medication, and at times old age. The 'functional' long stay



patients, on the other hand, are living without debilitating illness but are considered unfit to resume an independent life in the open community owing to an isolated, institutional existence for years. Many of these functional patients serve as off-the-record attendant staff and take care of the chronically ill patients in the wards.

These people, in most cases, have become

permanent residents of the mental hospitals because their families have abandoned them after struggling with a vicious cycle of relapses of the illness and subsequent readmissions. Others have been found wandering on the streets or living on railway platforms and have been brought in by the Police. Referred to as 'certified cases', this latter category of people may find it the most difficult to leave the hospital¹. Years of untreated

illness, neglect and abuse on the streets render many 'chronic'. Even those who recover are either unable to remember their accurate place of origin or eventually remember but by that time, have been forgotten by the hospital administration. The result, once again, is lifelong institutionalization.

Long stay patients are, thus, especially disadvantaged from among the population of incarcerated, homeless, disabled, destitute persons.

Why long stay?

There are several interconnected reasons for the problem of long stay. The biggest is the custodial environment of the mental hospital itself. The closed nature of these institutions breeds isolation and exclusion, leading to progressively deteriorating skills for daily living and social interaction and subsequently, prolonged periods of stay in the hospital³¹. There is little done to prepare the patients to resume life after discharge from the hospital. Nor are family members counseled or prepared for the emotional stresses that ensue, causing greater and greater adjustment problems, relapses, readmissions and finally, abandonment. Researchers across the globe have declared custodial care the primary reason for the problem of long stay and chronicity of mental illness

Absent community mental health facilities and lack of social support to affected families is another major reason for abandonment. Poor families are unable to cope with the complications of the illness, the social stigma and the economic pressures that follow the beginning of illness. Medical treatment is inaccessible, social support nil, leaving many families with few options but to abandon their kin. A large number of mentally ill people wander away by themselves in bouts of the illness, from villages and small towns and are lost by the families forever.

An effort at expanding the mental health care system to include accessible, decentralized, de-custodial and de-institutionalized mental health services has been in the offing since the National Mental Health Programme was proposed in 1982 but progress in that direction has been slow and insignificant.

And then there is the legal angle. Civil rights and liberty of persons diagnosed as psychiatrically ill are severely curtailed by law. When a person is labeled mentally ill,

she loses all contractual and legal capacity. The mentally ill person cannot decide for herself, cannot marry, cannot own property, cannot vote and experiences many more such violations in areas of personal liberty, family life, economic affairs and political status, making it fundamentally difficult to live an independent community life. The State's legal and political framework, in that sense, favors custodial care for people with mental illnesses. Thus, a lack of rehabilitative spaces in the community fosters long stay.

In a scenario where mental hospitals are the primary set-ups for addressing serious mental health problems of the country's population and still cater to less than 10% of those in need, efforts to 'decongest' hospitals of long stay patients are urgently required. Even so, actors in the system talk in the same breath about the 'great advances in psychiatry' or hospitals not needing to become the 'waste-baskets of society', and of 'burnt out cases' or 'poor prognosis of psychoses' in order to justify long stay. There is an inherent confusion in the objectives and functions of these mental hospitals do they see themselves as providers of effective psychiatric treatment or as shelter for social rejects?

This confusion is mirrored in the way these mental hospitals function. Human rights violations in state mental hospitals was brought to focus in the past few years through a number of Public Interest Litigations, media spotlight and the National Human Rights Commission's report on *Quality Assurance in Mental Health in India* (1999). Inmates continue to be chained, locked, live in appalling and inhuman conditions with treatment facilities that are outdated. ECT abuse, over-medication, medical neglect is rampant. There is no effort at rehabilitation or meaningful human engagement of any kind with the

inmates. The operative logic seems to be that if these huge mental hospitals are no more than custodial arrangements to dump the discards of society, why put in the effort. These mental hospitals might as well be factories for turning people into vegetables.

Budget analyses of the mental health sector suggests that the amount of money used to cater to 15,000-odd inmates of these mental hospitals can more effectively be used to create responsive, accessible and community based mental health services for a majority of the needy population. Apart from sound economics, **de-custodial care respects the human rights of people with mental illness the right to a life of freedom, dignity and proper care.**

Thus, an ineffective if not downright damaging State mental health system, where resources allocated to mental health are actually used to run institutions that produce and sustain destitution, needs to be changed.

Maitri: A rights-based approach to mental healthcare

The primary goal of the *Maitri*, being run by ActionAid India in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission is to demonstrate the process of transitioning from a custodial system to



de-custodial models of care and community based alternatives. The project is a model-building exercise, aimed specifically at tackling the problem of reintegration in the community of long stay patients in the hospitals and broadly, to create a replicable, sustainable and cost-effective system of services that improvise on and displace the present set-ups.

Maitri attempts to reorganize the mental hospitals to provide day care facilities, halfway homes, and protected communities for the abandoned and uncared. In other words, it aims at rehabilitation and re-integration facilities in these hospitals in addition to bio-medical treatment facilities. Also, *Maitri* is working at the community level to fight the stigma and exclusion that people living with mental illnesses face. The project is providing active support and enhancing the capacities of the families as well as the community at large to care for their mentally ill members. This would go a long way in stopping the cycle of readmissions and relapses and consequently, long term hospitalization.

The project is currently being implemented in three State-run mental hospitals in North India. These are the Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra; the Ranchi Institute of Neuro-Psychiatry and Allied Sciences, Ranchi; and the Gwalior Manasik Arogyashala, Gwalior. These three hospitals were selected because the Supreme Court, following public interest litigations (PILs) alleging human rights violations in these three hospitals, asked the National Human Rights Commission of India to monitor the functioning of the three hospitals. ActionAid was directed by the NHRC to design and implement a rehabilitation program for long stay patients in the three hospitals since September 2002.

How Maitri works

The *Maitri* team works closely with patients to gauge individual needs and design personalized rehabilitation. We start by first identifying-

- A. Patients who are recovered and can be reintegrated with the family;
- B. Patients whose families cannot be traced but who are recovered and can live semi-independent lives within groups in the local community.

- C. Patients, who are chronically ill, have been abandoned within the institution for a long time and require a protected setting.

All the patients make the transition from the hospital to the community through a day care facility or a preparatory home, set inside the premises of the hospital.

Efforts are then made to locate the patients' families and assess the situation at home for its conduciveness to integrate the patient with the family. Intensive follow-up support to the families is an essential aspect of the design as is identifying and connecting with social support systems, carried out by the team of rehabilitation workers.

Those patients who are recovered yet abandoned and can manage semi-independence are trained in income generating vocational skills and residential options explored outside.

Protected communities are needed for a small number of chronically ill and abandoned patients who are either not responding to treatment and have been in the hospital for most of their life, or are persons with special needs due to socially unacceptable behavior, multiple health problems etc. The protected community is an important part of the project design but not part of our immediate project mandate.

Challenges

Needless to say, a new venture such as this faces a lot of challenges. To take up the most obvious cases, tracing families are sometimes huge challenge area. Many mentally ill women are either illiterate or, due to the illness, unable to recall basic

information that may help the *Maitri* team to trace their families. Even as addresses as traced, families have sometimes moved house or are too poor to support the patient. Re-uniting families is also difficult as the dynamics of the relationships may have changed and the family sees no role for the patient in the home. There are no readily accessible mechanisms for medical or counseling support to the families after the patients return home. Sometimes, willing relatives are faced with red tape in securing discharge orders from the hospitals.

The *Maitri* project is an attempt to demonstrate that de-custodial care of people with mental illness in the mental health care system in the country is a viable, cost-effective option. So far, around 100 of the 450 long stay patients that the project has worked with have been rehabilitated in the communities.

We believe that any interventions that are made with destitute and disabled people ought to make good use of existing spaces in the community and the larger society. This makes options other than custodial care available to mentally ill people, options that do not compromise their dignity and freedom as human beings.

Editor's Note: Some other ways that ActionAid has been involved in the issue of mental health include psycho-social support to disaster-hit communities, including the earthquake and communal violence in Gujarat, the super-cyclone in Orrisa, and more recently the Kashmir earthquake and the tsunami. Besides this, ActionAid also supports models of community-based mental health services in different parts of the country.

boundary

*the moment she was conscious
she wanted to look smell feel hear the world
and she made to step out the door
but she was told - No.
these walls are your horizon
this ceiling is your sky.
to see how much life lies beyond
unseen on the other side
she unlocks the back-gate and peeps out
but she is told - No.
this little fragment of soil
this is your all of your world.*

– Tasleema Nasreen

Excerpts from ActionAid India's Country Strategy Paper

Rights First!

Working together to end poverty and patriarchy

Vision:

A world without poverty and injustice, one in which every woman, man and girl and boy enjoys the right to life with dignity.

Mission:

To work with poor and excluded women, men and girls and boys to eradicate poverty, discrimination and injustice.

Values

- *Solidarity with the poor, the powerless and the excluded* will be at the core of our struggle against poverty and injustice
- *Courage of conviction*, requiring us to be creative and progressive, bold and innovative without fear of failure in order to make both the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty, exclusion and injustice
- *Equality and justice*, requiring us to work to ensure equal opportunity to every person, irrespective of caste, class, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, colour, class, ethnicity, disability, location, and religion
- *Humility and modesty* in our conduct and behaviour, recognizing that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and exclusion
- *Mutual respect*, requiring us to recognise the innate worth of every individual and community and the value of diversity
- *Honesty and transparency*, demanding that we are accountable at all levels in order to be more effective in our actions and open in our judgements and interaction with others
- *Independence and neutrality* from any religious or party-political affiliation.

Guiding Principles

- Non-hierarchical in our own working and in our interface with all stakeholders by creating and upholding decentralised systems of work for efficient functioning
- Ensuring participation by enabling poor and excluded people to get fully involved in decision-making through the conscious inclusion of all poor and excluded groups

- Respecting people's knowledge, wisdom and skills by acknowledging the innate worth and capacity of all humans, by listening to people's voices, empathising with people's daily struggles and appreciating poor people's ingenuity and resilience.
- Challenging patriarchy manifested through unequal power relations between women and men, both within and outside the organisation, by supporting the daily struggles and assertions of women and girls
- Respecting social diversity and leveraging the creative potential of all peoples and communities for social change and transformation.
- Ensuring downward accountability and transparency to the poor and excluded communities through the consistent application of good practices and effective communication.
- Deepening the quality of our engagement with the poor and excluded people and opposing all forms of violence
- Enabling collective leadership to emerge within excluded communities so that every member owns and shares responsibility and accountability for her/his actions
- Preventing conflict of interest while carrying out our responsibilities as civil society actors.

Rights First, expresses ActionAid's commitment to enable an alliance of the marginalised that will empower the poor and excluded peoples to claim their human rights as Indian and global citizens. It reflects our identity what we stand for and what we pledge to do over the next six years, e.g., 20052010.

Rights First declares that our core constituencies for rights action would be the dalit people, tribal people, most backward groups within the other backward classes (OBC), minorities, urban poor people, informal sector labour, women, persons living with HIV and AIDS, sex workers, trafficked people and persons affected by natural and human made disasters. Further, within each social group, the focus will be on the rights of women, persons with disability and children.

Deepening our Actions

Right First seeks to deepen our ongoing work and partnerships with poor and excluded people by:

- Enriching our work on the rights mode with new insights from the human rights discourse and praxis
- Enabling poor people to assert themselves for human rights that are instrumental in satisfying their basic needs
- Unambiguously expressing our commitment and action on the rights of women and girls to social equality
- Ensuring that our thematic work is seamlessly linked with partnering social groups our core constituencies
- Enabling an alliance of the marginalised people by facilitating the poor and excluded to form their agency and collectively engage in social change and transformation.
- Taking sides with the poor and marginalised and strengthening their agency for rights action
- Rights of women, persons with disability and child rights permeate all our work and programmes as cross cutting themes
- Addressing distress needs of people in vulnerable situations within the constitutional framework of the right to life and right to subsistence
- Presenting a pluralist identity of ActionAid International-India to all our stakeholders. For instance, donor agencies or activist organisations will be treated as equal partners for social change and transformation.

Goals of *Rights First*

Rights First seeks to achieve the following four goals in partnership with our core constituencies:

- Form an alliance of the marginalised to engage with institutions of the state and ensure the realisation of rights to food and livelihood, education, health, shelter and human security
- Women, children, persons with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS are empowered to exercise

power and assert their rights and entitlements. Immediate distress needs of the vulnerable people are fully addressed through processes that reinforce their dignity with local, national and international support. Solidarity between the marginalised communities and larger civil society will emerge to resist and fight discrimination, inequity and exclusion.

Programme Strategies

Building Alliance of the Marginalised

Core focus is two-fold:

- Support empowerment of poor and excluded people by enabling them to understand the root causes of their poverty and exclusion
- Assist in the formation of an alliance of the excluded people that will enable them to collectively challenge existing social, economic and political processes, as well as, institutions, laws and policies that perpetuate inequity and injustice. This will result in:
- Poor and excluded people effectively challenging the unequal power relationships in society and asserting their human rights in both public and private spheres
- Fostering solidarity within the poor people for collective and sustained actions for social change and transformation.

Facilitating Just and Democratic Governance

- The primary thrust is to ensure social justice by supporting processes that amplify the voices, power and influence of the poor and excluded people in institutions and decision making with particular focus to women, children, people with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS. Also, build capacity of civil society to monitor the state and its institutions to ensure just, transparent and accountable governance. Key outcomes are:
- Deepening democracy by supporting the poor and excluded, women in particular, to actively participate in governance processes
- Enhanced accountability and transparency of the State towards pro-poor and gender; access to human rights, public resources and state services.

Enforcing Rights of Women and Girls

Primary focus:

- Gender analysis to understand the oppressive patriarchal power structures both in domestic and public spheres
- Challenge and change social processes, institutions, laws and policies at local, national and global levels which are

manifestly anti-women and anti-girl.

Key outcomes:

- Empowered women's groups that will create a social space for themselves and help assert their rights in the private and public spheres, along with gaining greater access and control over common property resources.
- Change in attitude among men and boys from gender based stereotyping to supporting the cause of gender equality and equity.

Addressing Immediate Poverty Needs

Primary focus:

- Create community-based system that copes with emergencies and combats anti-women and girls' coping strategies
- Establish accountability of state and civil society for timely relief and reconstruction.

Key outcomes:

- Capacities and resources of communities are enhanced to cope with emergencies.
- Linkages with the state established for greater access of their services with dignity.

Diversifying Resource Base

Primary focus is on diversifying our financial and human resource base by mobilising ethical

funding and volunteers from the larger civil society and from institutional donors and corporates for rights and justice work. This would result in increased participation and a sense of ownership by the non-poor sections of the civil society of the programmes and initiatives to address the issues and concerns of the poor and excluded people.

A set of five objectives guides the organisation effectiveness:

Deepening Accountability and Transparency

Expanding credibility of the organisation and programmes with multiple accountability and transparent processes focused on our core constituencies. Our monitoring and evaluation methodology to be strengthened, ensuring multiple accountability, participation and rigorous social and power analysis.

Decentralisation and Horizontal Working

Empowerment of all frontline staff and promoting horizontal working would become an integral part of our work culture, achieved through effective decentralisation, democracy and participation guided by strategic coherence and transparency. Accountability to be institutionalised at all levels delineating clear roles.

Enforcing Gender and Social Equity

Making gender and social equality and equity central to ActionAid's being and doing. We will institutionalise gender analysis and integrate power framework towards creating an enabling environment through addressing exclusion at the work place and challenging the attitude to gender stereotyping.

Achieving Learning Organisation

Institutionalise action reflection process to capture best practices and encourage innovation.

Strengthen staff capacity in knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to deliver our mission. Shared learning to be institutionalised across the organisation.

Aligning Structure to Values and Principles

Facilitate and nurture an organisational structure that synergises thematic work with work across

horizontal and geographical boundaries. Here, we will be guided by highest and best standards

of accountability for the outputs, outcomes and impacts of our actions. We will strive to create an empowering and motivating environment through organisational processes that facilitate internalisation of our core values and principles.

The Way Forward

While our response to addressing structural causes of poverty of the most vulnerable people continues, in the strategy period (2005-10), we will engage with specific categories of excluded

poor people and their movements, to enable formation of an alliance that challenges unequal and unjust power relations through a process of empowerment and assertion of their human rights. To be effective, we would require to nurture and support organisations or poor and excluded people and assist social movements guided by 'platform politics', without assuming leadership positions. We will progressively work in networks and alliances striving to create synergy and solidarity to take our work forward.

Both rights issues that are most significant to fighting poverty and patriarchy, and our core constituencies the social groups will guide us in forming thematic teams. We link with the ActionAid international campaigns on women's rights, food and hunger, education, HIV and AIDS, and governance.

Education: For today and tomorrow

Niraj Seth

The general picture

With more than quarter of a billion children, education in India is certainly a priority as far as people's agenda goes.

The year 2005 saw, significantly, the presentation of reports by the Central Advisory Board on Education, or the CABE committee, of the government of India. The committee, that had more or less been non-functional in the past, came together to discuss various issues as part of sub-committees. For the first time, the civil society was represented too in the deliberations. The Right to Education Bill, that continues to elude general agreement and is yet to be tabled in Parliament, was discussed as part of the Committee. On the positive side, the national curricular framework is now finalised. Also, the government has promised increased allocation for education, but the general picture still appears bleak.

While the actual number of schools in the country has gone up, the average child in the country still does not have access to

quality education. The liberalisation of the economy and the resultant increase in the rich-poor divide seems to be getting reflected in the upsurge in the number of private schools. This is a cause for worry because there are concerns that it may lead to the government withdrawing from its obligations.

ActionAid's role

Given this policy environment, a number of challenges are thrown up for rights-based organisations like ActionAid. On reflecting on our work, we found that we needed to strengthen our advocacy work. We also found that while we had done significant work with the excluded groups in enabling the access to schools, work on enabling them to access their rights within the school system was required. At the same time, we are becoming increasingly aware of the strength of raising our voices across the continents.

What we have done

At the international level, ActionAid's working group has raised some pertinent questions for action:

- What is the possibility of education being offered as a right in all countries?
- Can we demand for education as a fundamental right in across Asia?
- Up to which class or grade do we want free and compulsory education? What is feasible? Should the Convention on the Rights of Children, as ratified by many countries, be accepted as a standard?
- What about user fees? What is our position in the context of different countries?
- What kind of budgetary allocation is required for the education sector? What kinds of demands need to be raised with the national governments?
- Schools as peace zones: is this probable?
- Is it possible to impart secular education in schools? Is it possible to have a SAARC initiative to get historians together to see education in a non-fundamentalist way and link up with universal human values?

Everywhere we marks in India, getting children to school is the most basic - and widespread - for of our efforts. Invisible groups of children, such as children belonging to migrants, are a special focus. For example, extreme poverty in certain pockets of West Orissa compels families to migrate to Andhra Pradesh, where brick kiln owners illegally employ thousands of labourers who have to live in very harsh conditions. We work with these groups to enable access to basics such as shelter, health and education. Bridge courses are offered for children of migrant communities, in their mother tongues. Last year, 26 non-residential and 1 residential bridge course centre were opened across 3 districts of Andhra Pradesh. 2721 children have been part of the bridge courses.

Using this as a demonstration project, advocacy work is on for the government to step in to provide educational facilities for migrant children in both states. The experience also feeds into our engagement on the debate around the Right to Education Bill.

Children living in difficult circumstances, such as street children or children with disabilities, are another focus group, since they find it tough to get enrolled as well as continue schooling. The story of 16-years old Tuktuki Shekh, who has lived all her life rag picking on the streets of Kolkata, is a case in point. She tried time and again, to continue her schooling, despite losing her certificates in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's e-viction drives. With some support, Tuktuki is finally appearing for her board exams.

We have questioned the Government on the right of such vulnerable children along with MV Foundation and Haq, we have asked how it the government intends to implement the act banning child labour.

In Chhattisgarh, Ranbai, a widowed mother, brought everyone in her community together to complain against the schoolteacher, who had sold off a quintal of foodgrains meant for use in the village government's midday meal scheme. The complaint led to nothing: the village headman was hand in gloves



with the teacher and threatened to silence the complainants. Instead of losing heart, Ranbai went on to repeat the complaint to the Sub Divisional Magistrate, who immediately transferred the teacher. Since then, the midday meals have become quite regular in the village.

Retention is a huge problem across the length and breadth of the country. One of the main reasons why children drop out is because they do not find education particularly useful. Quality education in government schools is thus a main work concern.

The audi author method, whereby the audience is actively engaged in a process of story telling, is an experiment on quality education. The audience is presented with a literary text, which reaches a point where a question or dilemma is posed. The audience then go ahead and share how they would like the situation to be resolved. Used largely with

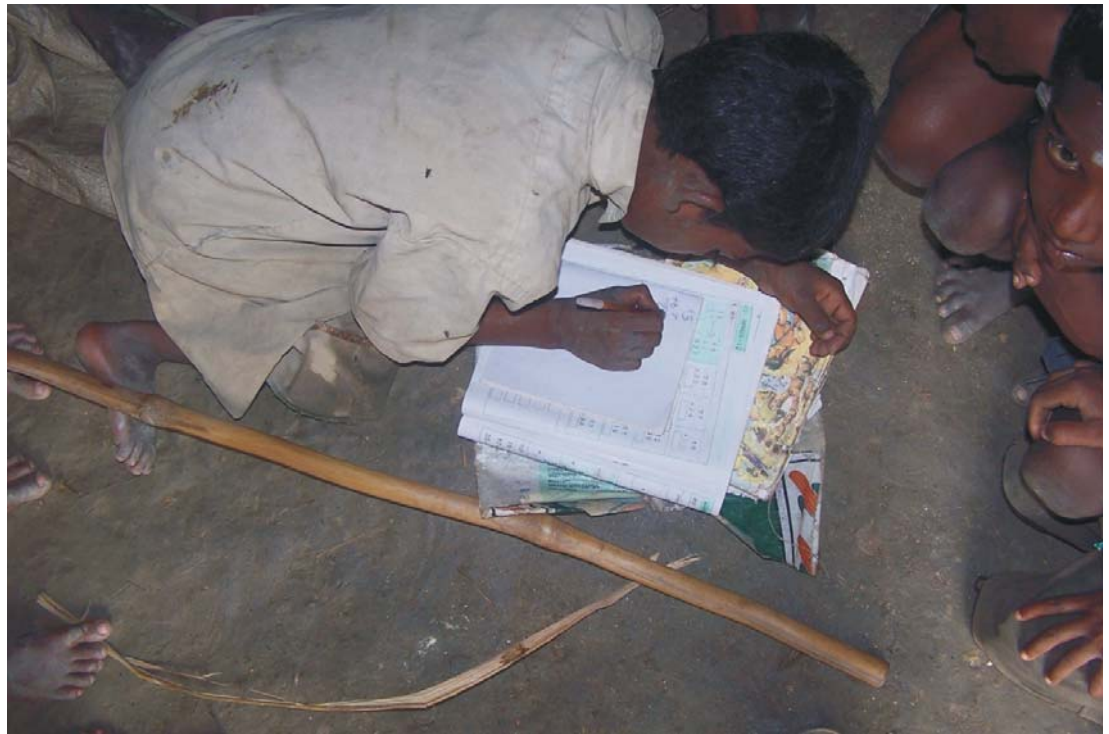
illiterate audiences in West Bengal, it helps bring out nuances and augments deep understanding and sharing on issues as abstract as sexuality, social injustice and the like.

An education campaign funded by the Commonwealth Education Fund is currently running in 20 districts of Orissa. Covering areas where most of the

population belongs to indigenous tribes, the campaign aims at universalising primary education. A major highlight of this work was a participatory survey covering 1,88,016 people. Based on this, a status report was prepared for 50,400 children from 422 schools. The survey highlights the common ailments of the schooling system: lack of teachers, blackboards and school buildings, among other things.

Issues to do with education continue to be special areas of our international advocacy and study initiatives as well, such as one to study the impact of neo-liberal policies.

Obviously, the way forward is to be carved from these grassroots initiatives from all over the country. The youngest citizens of the world, after all, deserve a much better deal.



*So many childhoods
Crushed and bloody
Would weep and ask
Will someone tell me
Those simple fears
Those innocent fears
of ghosts and djinns
can you not see them now?
Have you seen them anywhere?*

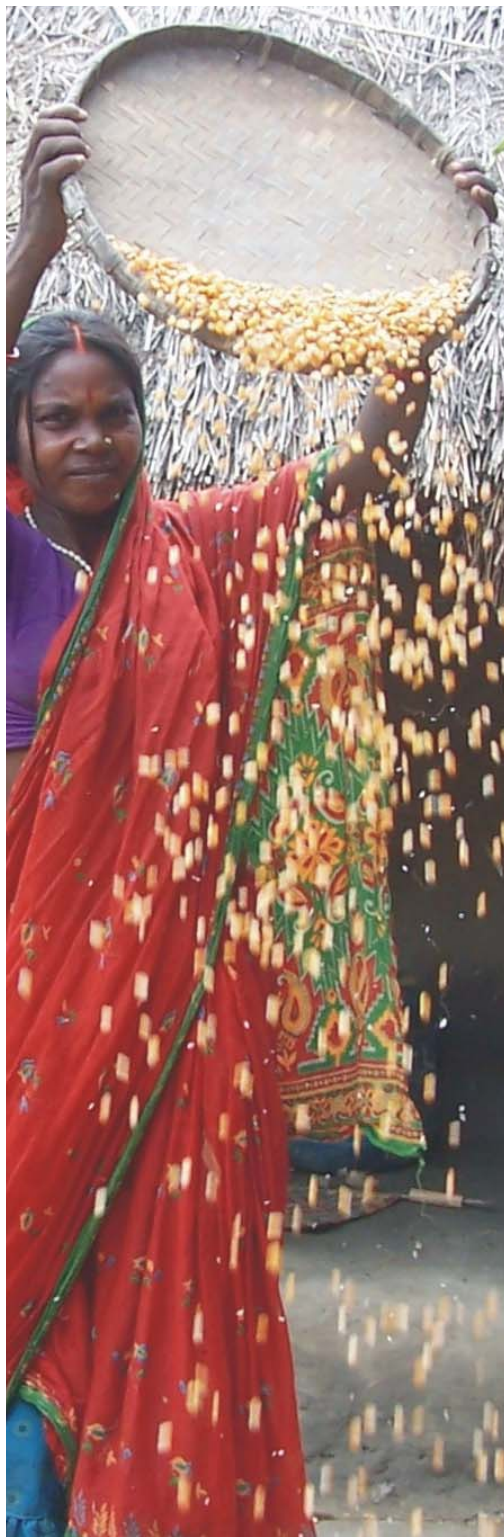
Saharias win a battle

Jagat Ballabh Pattnaik and
Deepali Sharma

In 2001, the Supreme Court of India passed interim orders to ensure food security for the most marginalized communities of the country. This was in response to the public interest litigation on the 'Right to Food' filed in the same year. At around the same time ActionAid had launched the *Sahariya* initiative which revealed the widespread irregularity and pilferage in the operation of the Government's food security schemes, especially the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), launched on 25th December, 2000 to provide food grains to families living under the poverty line.

To this end, Antyodaya cards were supposed to be provided by the Government to families living in areas reeling under drought for three consecutive years. The plan was to identify around ten million families who would then be able to buy food grains at subsidized rates of Rs. 2 per kilogramme for wheat and Rs. 3 per kilogramme for rice. The Sahariya initiative, however, uncovered that very few of the Sahariya community had received a card even though all of them were eligible. This failure to cover all below-poverty-line families under the Antyodaya scheme was giving leeway to government officials at the district and the block levels, as well as local transporters, to divert the food grains and selling it to local dealers.

ActionAid's network partners, such as *Sampark*, *Parbit*, *CID* and *Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti*, in collaboration with the community members, helped to highlight this reality not only to the media and the district administration but also to the State Advisors and the National Commissioners to the Supreme Court of India. Relentless campaigning, not only by



ActionAid but groups across the board, from local to the national levels, resulted in the appointment of a Government-appointed fact-finding team which visited the villages and submitted a report to the Supreme Court. The report supported the claims of mismanagement raised by the Sahariya community. The district administration was ordered to look into the issues brought up in the report. In her response to the Supreme Court, the District Collector assured the administration's complete support to the cause of the Sahariyas.

The results? At the most immediate level, 37,492 cards have since issued to Sahariya families. Other more long-term positive effects include the abolition of the system of contracting private transporters to carry foodgrains from the district head-quarters to the block head-quarters, and wheat is now transported directly by the Civil Supplies agency, with a monitoring service set up to report on any irregularity and ensure transparency in such matters. More specifically, the community was also able to achieve their demand that ration shops be kept open throughout the month. The Food and Civil Supplies Department has passed an order to this effect. Grains will now be provided strictly in keeping with the prescribed quota and rate for each card-holder. Moreover, the district administration has taken it upon itself to ensure that the full quota of food grains under the Annapurna Antyodaya Yojana, that is, 11820 quintals of wheat and 1170 quintals of rice, will be distributed to the 37,492 card holders of the Sahariyas community.