

**#BloodBricks** is a global campaign to highlight issues of forced and child labour, particularly in brick kilns and construction sites around the world. A joint effort of USI, Prayas, ActionAid India and Thompsons Scotland, #BloodBricks ally with trade union organisations, NGOs and human rights campaigners to educate and empower thousands of workers to raise wages, access public services and to combat child labour and sexual exploitation.

In India, campaigners of #BloodBricks have stood in complete solidarity with the collective struggle of workers that resulted in wage hikes across Rajasthan, Gujarat and Telangana. Campaigners have also played a crucial role in rescuing hundreds of workers from debt bondage and in facilitating the compensation and rehabilitation of these rescued workers. Most importantly the campaign has empowered workers

to organise and struggle for their rights. The campaign is also advocating with several government departments and drawing awareness to protection issues at work sites, education for children of workers families, social security measures and statutory benefits to workers.

The campaign has received support from across the world including the British and Scottish parliaments which noted the condition of the labourers

and raised concerns over the lack of enforcement of guidelines by multinational companies especially those having operations in the UK.



**WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR AT THE WSF TUNIS**

come together to develop  
**a People's Internet Manifesto**

Organising an Internet Social Forum - A call to occupy the Internet

on 26th March  
at Amphi 4, WSF 2015  
from 15:00 PM to 17:30 PM

[www.internet-socialforum.net](http://www.internet-socialforum.net)

ROUNDTABLE  
25 March  
2:00-4:00pm  
ENF-A Amphitheatre Assala

**SOVEREIGN PROJECTS OF THE SOUTH**

FOR A NEW TRI-CONTINENTAL SOLIDARITY  
World Social Forum, Tunis 2015

**Disclaimer:** The WSF Tunis Special Edition carries articles from across India written by journalists and researchers. These articles need not necessarily reflect the views of ActionAid.

# SOUTHERN VOICES



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**AGRO-DIVERSITY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA**



WSF Tunis Special Edition

# RE-IMAGINE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCES

**The global justice movement needs new ideas and renewed energies. Benny Kuruvilla argues for a more sustained engagement between social movements and progressive governments.**

By many measures, the South today is a contradictory place. While big emerging economies such as China, Brazil, India and South Africa assert themselves on the world stage and challenge western hegemony over international institutions and forums, they are essentially treading the crisis ridden path of export oriented growth based on cheap labour with little consideration to social and ecological costs. Immense wealth and grinding poverty co-exist in much of the south, fuelling social crises on a daily basis.

For instance, take agriculture from which millions in the South continue to earn their livelihoods.

In many developing countries, the agrarian crisis (manifested in struggles for land and decent wages, distress migration, lower per capita availability of food and environmental degradation) and its resolution continues to be the central question for social and political movements concerned with equity and justice. Global movements such as Via Campesina – the north-south network of peasants and agriculture workers – have advanced the concept of food sovereignty and agro-ecology as a solution to

Social movements and activists in the South are not only challenging this destructive development model but also going beyond resistance to articulate systemic alternatives.

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## EDITORIAL

As the World Social Forum (WSF) enters its 15th year, it returns to Tunisia – the cradle of the Arab Spring. The spark that was ignited in the coastal town of Ben Arous in December 2010 set off popular revolts in the Arab world and inspired movements across the globe. Four years after the jasmine revolution, with unrelenting multiple global crises of finance, development, jobs and the environment, the WSF will be an important space for building solidarity, sharing struggle notes, debating and dreaming about a progressive future not just for Tunisia, but for thousands of activists from across the world who are expected to converge in the capital for rallies, plenaries, cultural events and over one thousand workshops.

This special edition comes to you from India, where the WSF arguably had its biggest success when Mumbai hosted it in 2004. This issue features inspiring stories; of fishing communities who have rebuilt their lives after the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami; a village that is advancing agro-diversity in the North East of India; a balladeer whose inspiring songs are rooted in the lived experience of people; of indigenous women who are lighting up their village with solar energy; of activists who are fighting to end forced labour; of a movement to democratise and occupy the internet; and artists from Palestine building south-south solidarity through theatre.

Another world is not just possible, but necessary!

In solidarity,  
**Sandeep Chachra**  
Executive Director, ActionAid India



# 10 YEARS SINCE TSUNAMI RE-BUILDING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

**A decade after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, affected fishing communities have battled dislocation, sea erosion and a fast depleting marine life. 10 years since the tragedy struck, Swapna Majumdar travels to India's Southern coast to tell us about collective efforts of people in rebuilding their lives.**

Just across Nalla Thaneer Odai (NTO) Kuppam, a fishing hamlet in the Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu, is the sea. It has slowly edged closer to the village over the last decade. But it is not the sea erosion but the spectre of eviction that has haunted the fishing community here for the past 10 years ever since the tsunami struck in 2004.

The state government wants to construct tenements under its tsunami housing scheme along this stretch and NTO Kuppam lies in the way. The government's offer of houses in a relocation site to compensate them for moving out was found to be several kilometres away from their present location and they refused to give up their traditional rights. Even today, the fishing hamlet continues to resist the relocation moves of the government. However, very few fishermen thought they would be able to stand up to the government for so long since many families accepted the offer and relocated.

For the majority that remained and resisted, it was largely the efforts of the Coastal Community Protection Movement (CCPM), comprising tsunami affected men and women and the Forum for Securing Land and Livelihood Rights of the Coastal Communities (FLLRC), a network of four non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that helped.

In fact, the FLLRC was formed to help communities claim their rights after ActionAid, one of the first voluntary organisations to start tsunami relief, found that the government's rehabilitation programme was pushing the marginalised community out of their traditional lands.

## Community Smart Solution

In NTO Kuppam, it is Desingu, the 47-year-old community leader, who is in the forefront of the movement against eviction. The villagers learnt how to map their village resources and then decide whether or not moving out would be beneficial.

The next step was to visit the alternative houses proposed for them. Not only were these tenements small with inadequate space to keep their boats and nets, it also lacked basic amenities. More importantly, the tenement location was very far from NTO Kuppam and the sea. This was enough for the community to turn down the government offer.

"I can gauge the quantity and variety of fish by the colour of the sea and the movement of the waves. I go into the sea accordingly, even if it is at odd hours. But if my house is far away from the sea, how can I see the water? If I cannot see the water, how can I fish and how will I survive?" asked Desingu.



Photo Credit: Srikanth Kolari, ActionAid

The community knew that NTO Kuppam was facing sea erosion and that they needed to find a solution. They also realised that they would have to move out before it became life threatening. At the same time, they did not want to relocate to the government site.

One of the solutions that came up during the community discussions was to find a site that was not too far from the sea and yet safe from sea erosion. They found one such site adjacent to their village which was within 300 metres from the high tide line. Since it housed only an unused factory, it was ideal for relocating their entire village. Not only would this site be just 50 metres away from their village, but they would also be able to keep their boats safely.

Armed with this ideal solution, the community took the help of an architect to prepare a blueprint of their housing plan. The community feels empowered by the manner in which it went about seeking a solution. Instead of merely shouting slogans and holding demonstrations, the interactions with the FLLRC helped them actively look for and present an alternate plan to the government. Now they hope that the district collector who seemed impressed with it will help implement it.

## Non-Fishing Communities

While residents of NTO Kuppam were able to withstand pressures to relocate, many of the devastated communities living along the Chennai coast living in relief camps and temporary shelters following the tsunami were not so lucky. Within two months of the tsunami, the state government's Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) managed to move out about 3,347 families, mostly dalits, from the coastal villages on grounds that their relocation to two suburban ghettos 20 to 25 km away, was for their own safety.

They were also told that new houses would soon be built for them at least 500 metres away from the high tide line to protect them from any future calamity. At that time, there was no reason for the community to disbelieve them. It was only after they had moved out that some NGO working on tsunami relief found the relocated families

had been persuaded to put their signatures on documents agreeing to leave their traditional lands. The signatures of consent were reportedly taken by officials under the pretext of determining their "eligibility" for housing. No mention was made of relocation.

The marginalised and poor communities faced discrimination even during the government relief operations. When ActionAid began working with the urban coastal communities in Chennai following the tsunami in 2004, it found government efforts at relief and rehabilitation were not reaching all the communities. In particular, dalits (lower caste) and tribals living along the coast faced prejudice since they did not belong to the fishing community although many of them were engaged in allied work.

The coastal communities comprise fishing and non-fishing families. The latter are not engaged in fishing as their main occupation. They live in the settlements (called nagar) along with the fishing community hamlets (known as Kuppam), and are involved in selling fish, dry fish processing, working at the ice plant and related business, boat and engine repair, and net making.

Just like the fishing community, the livelihood of the non-fishing communities, primarily dalits, is also dependent entirely on their access to the coast. They were among the first targets a larger plan to relocate 29,909 families living in the urban coastal districts of Chennai and Thiruvallur to rehabilitation sites constructed about 25 km away from the original place of habitation. Many of the traumatised families succumbed, moving into the tiny resettlement flats. But their living conditions were terrible. These families, comprising at least six members, were forced to live in these cramped one room quarters without adequate sanitation, water and electricity.

Although these basic amenities were improved much later following the upsurge of community protests, two families still have to share one bathroom.

## RTI to the Rescue

The deplorable living conditions of the relocated families helped others to thwart government attempts to evict them. When

the government rolled out its beach beautification plan, it was through a series of applications filed by the community under the Right to Information (RTI) Act that it became known that residents of more than 3,000 hutments would be evicted from their homes to make way for parks, theatres, commercial hubs, convention centres and luxury hotels. This information proved key to the community's campaign to halt the implementation of the project. Armed with this data, the community refused to give up their traditional land and demanded the government renovate all their houses damaged by the tsunami. The government agreed to give up its eviction plans and repair the existing houses. Plans of a proposed express highway across the Chennai and Thiruvallur districts were similarly revealed through RTI petitions filed by the coastal community. For the highway to be constructed, 14 villages would have to be demolished, thus adversely affecting the lives and livelihoods of 50,000 people.

When some coastal communities were relocated to areas as far as 30 km away from the sea, it added to their woes. Although some have continued fishing, many others, including those engaged in fish allied work, have given up and turned to other occupations. Those who fish have to now spend money on transportation to reach the coast. Not only has this reduced their earnings, but also made life harder, as they stay out on the sea longer to catch more fish to compensate the loss in income. The FLLRC also supported their demand for an increase in the monetary compensation given by the government during the lean season. The compensation has been increased from the existing Rupees 4,000 to Rupees 6,700 by a recent government order.

## Women Claim Rights

However, women who suffered loss of fishing baskets and weighing scales during the tsunami were not considered worthy of compensation by the government as these were not seen as assets. The FLLRC partners identified articulate community women and built their capacity to inform and inspire action. This gave them the chance to turn the disaster into an opportunity. Coastal women have played a pivotal role

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# ADVANCING AGRO-DIVERSITY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

**Pamela Phillipose travels to Nagaland, to tell us an extraordinary story of enterprise that shaped Chendang village and gave it the title of 'Vegetable Village' that it wears today by virtue of producing over 20 tons of farm produce every year.**

We first caught a glimpse of Chendang village from a vantage point high above the valley where it lay. There it was, one among the eight villages that fall in Nagaland's Tuensang district's Sangsangnyu block, a small, unassuming cluster of houses sprawled out on top of a low hill, accommodating an estimated 170 families. It was an extraordinary story of enterprise that shaped Chendang village and gave it the title of 'Vegetable Village' that it wears today by virtue of producing over 20 tons of farm produce every year. Such an outcome was the result of hard work and an intimate understanding of how the distinct agro-ecological characteristics of the region could be utilised.

The Eleutherus Christian Society (ECS) had a relationship with the village that went back to the late 1990s when a few Self Help Groups had been set up there. Chongsen, a senior ECS representative, remembered doing a baseline survey of the village in 2004. It had 121 households at that point and the harvest could hardly sustain the community beyond two or three months in a year. For the rest of the time, the villagers survived largely on money made by cutting down trees and selling timber.

The question of ensuring sustainable livelihoods for the villagers of Chendang became crucial and this was one of the central

objectives of the ECS-ActionAid intervention as well. The possibility of cultivating vegetables slowly began to be explored. Remembered Chongsen, who was part of brainstorming sessions with the community, "During one of our early meetings at Chendang when we were urging the villagers to cultivate vegetables, an elderly man stood up and asked mockingly, 'Can vegetables replace rice?'"

*"We are experimenting all the time and now we have a demonstration greenhouse, where we are trying to grow new vegetables, and even flowers like marigold."*

This was a significant question because, according to Naga tradition, cultivators of rice had always enjoyed a higher social status within the community. In 2005, the state's Horticulture Department asked the ECS to adopt a village and develop its farming potential. Chendang was chosen. Slowly, a village that would grow only paddy and maize was encouraged to grow vegetables and other produce.

Take the humble potato. It was not actually foreign to the region - Tuensang had always cultivated the tuber - but yields from local varieties were low. At the same time, procuring quality seed tubers from distant locations was prohibitively expensive. Over time, and with the ECS liaising with agencies such as Krishi Vigyan Kendra and the Department of Agriculture Nagaland, challenges like these were overcome. With seed tubers from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) located in North India reaching its farmers, the average annual production of potatoes shot up dramatically bringing in handsome profits.

It was a similar story with other vegetables. Chendang's cabbages, cauliflowers and carrots soon began to flood the local markets.

Besides the ubiquitous onion, radish and brinjal, it grew high-end produce like capsicum and broccoli as well. The learning curve also meant understanding pricing mechanisms. Initially, the large capsicums produced here were sold for one fifth of their cost until the actual rates for the vegetable in markets elsewhere became known.

Chendang went on to be officially acknowledged as one of Department of Agriculture Nagaland's 52 'Vegetable Villages' that produced a variety of vegetables through community farming. In February 2014, one of its farmers, Asangla Chang, represented the village at Krishi Vasant 2014, the biggest ever congregation of farmers from across the country and inaugurated by India's President Pranab Mukherjee.

By 2013, the village was earning Rs 12 lakh from the sale of potato alone. But this was not just about rising income. Profits from vegetable cultivation went on to change the face of the village in innumerable ways. A village that had no toilets, and had pigs running everywhere, was totally transformed, not least in the area of school education. According to Chongsen, while most of the village children became school dropouts after Class IV in the earlier days, today 250 children from this village were studying in the higher classes in Tuensang and other towns, even while the students in Chendang's own school classrooms rose from 30 to around 750.

We caught up with Bambou, a village elder from Chendang, as he worked on a potato field, and realised how driven the vegetable farmers had become. Said Bambou, "We



Photo Credit: Chintan Gohil, ActionAid

are experimenting all the time and now we have a demonstration greenhouse, where we are trying to grow new vegetables, and even flowers like marigold." He also touched upon the fact that farmers here used chemical fertilisers and pesticides minimally, which meant that Chendang can potentially leverage the new consumer demand for organic produce and get better returns for their produce in days to come.

The potential of Tuensang as a honey producing region has also been recognised by the Nagaland Beekeeping and Honey Mission. According to the Mission, traditional beekeeping practices have been in existence in the district for centuries and the region has innumerable species of bees. Chendang also benefited from beekeeping and produces an estimated 2.50 metric tonnes of pure organic honey every year.

It is the impact of growing vegetables that has led to this efflorescence in a small Naga village. Chongsen smiled as he recalled the old man who had questioned the shift to vegetable farming so many years ago, "In 2006, when we went back for an impact assessment, that same person made it a point to come up and tell me, 'Yes, vegetables can replace rice.'" This, in brief, was how Chendang could emerge as a symbol of farming enterprise.

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## 10 YEARS SINCE TSUNAMI: RE-BUILDING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

in the community campaign to reclaim their land and livelihoods. It was their collective effort which ensured that the fishing hamlet Nochi Nagar residents finally shifted into in-situ flats built on the same land where they resided and earned their livelihood before the tsunami struck, after a long nine year struggle. Not only does every flat in the Nochi Nagar tenements have an attached toilet, it is also in the joint name of the husband and wife. Being co-owner has emboldened women to raise their voice against domestic violence. Women broke another barrier by demanding they be treated on par with men in all government entitlements for the fishing community.

Although the women could not convince the government to pay them separate compensation, they managed to get the payment made jointly to the husband and wife.

The growing confidence of women fish workers has translated into their trade union, a first in the state. The popular all-women fish market in Thiruvottiyur is run by the union members. They negotiate their own terms and drive a hard bargain when customers haggle, all with a winsome

smile. Here, too, they have ensured a separate toilet for women and better sanitary and drainage facilities.

Next on their agenda is to get the government to recognise the labour put of women fish workers and categorise them as workers. This will make the eligible for similar benefits given to men fish workers including medical and accident insurance, compensations, etc.

## Confidence and Challenges

The power of collectivisation and awareness of their rights has helped to assuage many of the fears of the tsunami affected coastal community. But challenges still exist. There is no telling when political capriciousness will overturn their lives. The danger of development-induced displacement still looms large. But now, as the NTO Kuppam fishing community has shown, they have learnt how to navigate the development bait thrown by the government.

(This article was originally published in Economic and Political Weekly in December, 2014)

Photo Credit: Srikanth Kolari, ActionAid



# THE INTERNET BELONGS TO ALL PEOPLE LET'S OCCUPY IT

**It being so central to our daily lives and social systems, what do we want the Internet to look like in the future? Should it be a decentralised network for unmediated social connections, and for creating, exchanging and sharing information, publicly or privately as we choose?**

As in the beginnings of the Internet, both trends are present; but the Internet is fast evolving towards the second scenario, as major transnational corporations concentrate their control over the net and security services such as the US National Security Agency and its close allies engage in pervasive monitoring. Such centralised control of international communications and data, alongside a vacuum of legal checks and balances with global application, are leading to an accumulation of global power in a few hands. This, in turn, not only threatens to further exacerbate imbalances of wealth and power, but could undermine the very bases of democratic society.

So then, what can be done to reverse this trend, before it becomes irrevocably ingrained in the Internet's DNA, and 'normalised'? In particular, how can organisations working for social justice, democracy, communication rights, free and open-source software, net neutrality, or the broad range of human rights, as well as for citizen empowerment above that of governments or corporations, contribute to building a People's Internet?

This call for an **Internet Social Forum** aims to create a global space precisely to take up these issues, where we will discuss the Internet we want, share information on our endeavours and struggles for democracy, human rights and social justice in relation

to the Internet, and develop collective action agendas.

**Why a Social Forum?** The Internet Social Forum (ISF) takes its inspiration from the World Social Forum (WSF) process and its visionary call that "Another world is possible" - we are suggesting that "Another (People's) Internet is possible". Recalling the WSF Charter, which calls for a different kind of globalisation than that "commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests", we are calling for an Internet from below which is controlled by the people-- including those not yet connected.

The WSF Charter presents the vision that "globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in history", marked by respect for universal human rights and the environment, and resting on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples. We see the ISF as a direct parallel to these efforts but within the sphere of the Internet and its governance.

*Beyond the technical issues of standards and management of domain names, Internet governance is increasingly about finding appropriate ways to respond to the larger framework of social and economic justice and human rights issues that are emerging as the Internet impacts society at large.*

From its first edition in Porto Alegre, in 2001, the WSF has been conceived as a people's opposition to the elites of the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) which we have now come to call the "1%"--those who represent and benefit from banker imposed austerity measures, from the globalisation of capital, and the ideological and institutional dominance of neo-liberalism; and



Photo Credit: The Huffington Post

also now in its Internet embodiment - the "Net Mundial Initiative" (NMI), recently launched by the World Economic Forum. The WEF's NMI is directed as the elite's attempt to provide self-serving 'solutions' with regard to global Internet-related public policy issues, and it simply takes one significant step forward in the WEF's continuing efforts to enable an economic and political hegemony by global corporations and the global 1%. The WSF process appears as the obvious and appropriate space to launch a movement for a People's Internet rather than an Internet in the interests of global economic and political elites.

Beyond the technical issues of standards and management of domain names, Internet governance is increasingly about finding appropriate ways to respond to the larger framework of social and economic justice and human rights issues that are emerging as the Internet impacts society at large. The governance of the Internet should be undertaken based on the same democratic principles and mechanisms as we expect in other aspects of our lives.

The Internet Social Forum will be open to participation by all those who believe in the philosophy and values of the WSF, and that the global Internet must evolve in the public interest. It will be underpinned by values of democracy, human rights and social justice. It will stand for participatory policy-making and promote people's control of social technologies, as for instance is represented in the community media movement. It will seek an Internet that is truly decentralised in its architecture and based on people's full rights to and control over data, information, knowledge and other 'commons' that the Internet has enabled the world community to generate and share.

The Forum also proposes to launch a bottom-up process for developing a People's Internet Manifesto, involving all concerned social groups, communities and movements, in different regions; from techies and ICT-for-development actors to media reform groups, democracy movements, women's rights organisations and social justice activists.

# BALLADS OF RESISTANCE & HOPE

**Cultural forms are often very effective mediums for conveying important social messages. Some, among them, lend themselves even more effectively to this purpose because they are rooted in the lived experiences of people. Pamela Phillipose finds out.**

Purulia is a district located in West Bengal, a state in the east of India. Purulia district is fortunate in having a very rich mosaic of cultural traditions as well as dance and drama forms which have emerged from the grassroots.

The song-and-dance routine in which both men and women participate, called the Jhumur, is a good example of such a tradition. Beloved of local tribal communities this form is used to mark and celebrate the passing seasons. Jhumur is usually performed before large public gatherings and its folk tunes, set to the rhythm of the dhol, or local drum, have a lilt all of their own, with lyrics that convey the pleasures and pains of daily life. The recital itself is a form of recreation for people who spend most of their day doing back-breaking work in the fields or forests.

Another popular form from this region is the Chhau, a form of dance theatre with wonderfully expressive masks. A distinctive

feature of the Chhau dance in Purulia is that unlike in other pockets where it is popular - like in Odisha's (Another state located to the south of West Bengal) Mayurbhanj district - it is sustained not by royal patrons but by the local communities themselves.

BJJAS (a local people's platform) has used both the Jhumur and the Chhau to take its message of the rights to food and work, as well as women's entitlements, to the last person. Revealed Khagan Mahato, who has been the sheet anchor of this effort, "Over the years we have composed many songs on this theme." As he spoke he broke into a Chhau song that talked about how the poor are forced to place dry thorn bushes outside the doors of their homes and depart for distant places because the drought has scorched their fields and they lie barren. The sadness inherent in that experience of departure and desertion is contrasted with an energetic assertion that these words lead up to: "Now we don't die of starvation/ Nor do we resort to migration/ All because of MGNREGA/ All because of MGNREGA." (MGNREGA is a rural employment guarantee act aiming at securing peoples livelihoods in rural areas in India)

We met up with Bhavani Prasad Singha, a cultural ambassador of sorts for the BJJAS. Although Singha does not have a tribal background - he is from the Khatri community - he was drawn to social concerns through his association with BJJAS members. Songs of rights and resistance came to him spontaneously after he began understanding the issues involved and the



Photo Credit: Pamela Phillipose, ActionAid

everyday realities of the local communities.

Recalled Singha, "From the very beginning I was drawn to two things: words and music. When I attended a BJJAS meeting in 2006, I knew instinctively that the campaigns that it was conducting were extremely important for poor people everywhere, and so I had no hesitation in being a part of that effort."

Singha revealed that he works within the two indigenous art forms of Jhumur and Chhau. "Jhumur is a song format used for happy and auspicious occasions. It celebrates Mother Nature. I had a guru in my village, who introduced me to this form and taught me how to use it. The other form is the dance theatre known as Chhau, which has traditionally been used to depict stories from the Mahabharat and Ramayan."

According to Singha, speeches don't sustain the attention of local audiences in Purulia district to the extent that dances and

songs do. He also believes people remember what they 'see' for much longer than from what they 'hear'. "With its melody, rhythm, lyrics and colourful masks, people are kept enthralled for hours. So we used these forms extensively for our 'Ek Saudin-er Kaj' (hundred days' work campaign). I have composed songs on many themes. For International Women's Day, for instance, I composed a song that went, 'trafficking in women, witchcraft and violence against women are different forms of women's oppression.'"

As we left him, lines from a song he had composed and sung, came back to us: Aine re adhikar dite kabe (the law gives us the right to work)/Prati pate bhaat chai (we need rice for every stomach)/Bhaater jane kaj chai (to earn that rice we need to work)/kajer jane ain chai (to get the work, we need the law)/keu khabe aar keu kha bana (one gets to eat, while the other does not)/ta habena, ta habena (that cannot happen, that cannot happen).

## FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# RE-IMAGINE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCES

both the agrarian and climate crisis. These alternative models reclaim peasants control over seeds, soils, water and embrace principles of co-operation and collectivism.

Another inspiring example is the Asia Floor Wage alliance (of trade unions and grassroots organisations) which has formulated the demand for a living wage for Asian garment workers (who are predominantly women). Today, less than 3% of the retail cost of a garment goes to a worker in Asia. The AFW aims to hold garment corporations in the North accountable by forging a wage consensus across Asian countries ranging from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Vietnam and Cambodia. By including basic needs such as housing, food, education and health care into wages, the AFW calls for a living wage, questioning the current 'poverty' wages. AFW squarely challenges the ability of companies to re-locate to countries with cheaper wages and bad working conditions. While the AFW is an international alliance that is led from Asia it builds both South-South and South-North partnerships.

Another inspiring example is the Asia Floor Wage alliance (of trade unions and grassroots organisations) which has formulated the demand for a living wage for Asian garment workers (who are predominantly women).

There are several other examples of alternatives from the South such as the attempt from Latin American groups to forge Alternative Frameworks for International Investment

and the ongoing effort by over 100 organisations for an International Peoples Treaty for the control of Transnational Corporations.

### Way forward: Re-thinking Internationalism

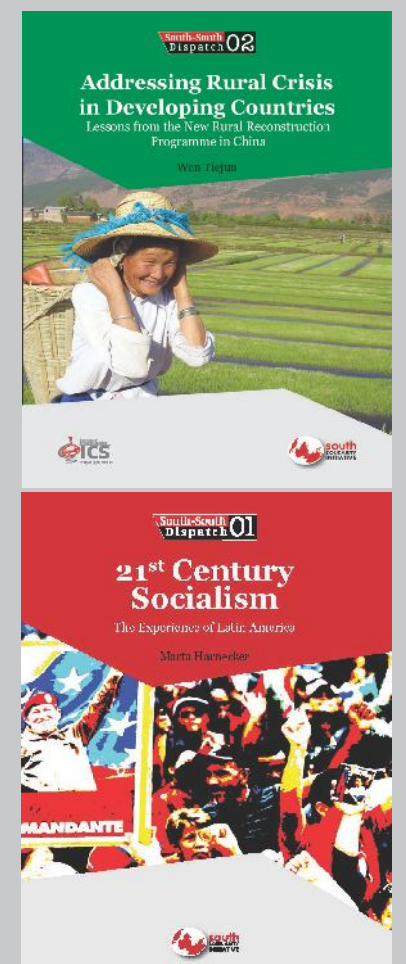
The obvious question is whether these initiatives are resulting in a radical transformation of the system. Powerful as these movements are in influencing a re-thinking of development options, they often do not encapsulate an integrated perspective of social and political transformation. Further, as David Harvey points out in his latest book 'The seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism' the challenge is to build alternatives that go beyond localism. This is where experiments in Latin America in building a new vision of 21st century socialism have provided a much needed impetus to movements in the global south. Progressive Governments in countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia have articulated the centrality of participatory and decentralised planning, popular protagonism, environmental consciousness and regional integration as key elements towards transformative change.

In December 2014, the 9 member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America-Peoples Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) celebrated 10 years of advancing a new model of regional integration in Latin America. Since 2004, ALBA has created new regional institutions for affordable health care (ALBA-Med), medical education (Latin American Medical School-

ELAM), telecommunications (Telesur), financial architecture (Bank of ALBA) and regional payments for trade (SUCRE). Social movements in these countries are pushing further, recognising that transformative and systemic change is a continuous process and progressive governments can often be co-opted by the system.

The current global conjuncture requires a new internationalism; a far more sustained engagement by social movements and trade unions (both in the South and North) with these progressive Governments. We need to be building more cross-border networks, identifying areas of cooperation and mutual learning to re-imagine and re-invent a new socialist politics that puts democracy, human development, ecology and protagonist politics at the centre. The axis of hope might currently be in Latin America; who knows where the pink tide might spread to next.

(This article was originally published in Red Pepper in March, 2015)



To download latest dispatches from the south, visit [www.southsolidarity.org](http://www.southsolidarity.org)



Photo Credit: Stephen Wandera, ActionAid

# Small farmers and agroecology can feed the world.

**This entails recognising women's role in food production - from farmer, to housewife, to working mother, women are the world's major food providers. It also means recognising small farmers, who are also the most vulnerable, and the most hungry - United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Prof Hilal Elver.**

**Anastasic Boyoya, a small holder farmer, holds a handwritten sign saying: I feed my family and many others, Kibumbwe, Gitaramuka Commune, Karusi Province, Burundi.**

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## A NEW VISION ON ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND ORGANISATIONAL FORMS

Over 100 representatives from the scientific community, social movements, peasant groups, academia and civil society organisations met in Thrissur in Kerala to discuss varied experiences on alternative technologies and organisational forms in agriculture, energy and rural non-farm enterprises. We carry below excerpts from the Thrissur Declaration.



Photo Credit: Urvashi Sarkar, ActionAid

We are in an era of systemic crisis – of economy, food, energy, climate and livelihoods. In India this is characterised by a deep agrarian crisis, declining social indicators, unemployment and underemployment, environmental degradation, lack of access to basic services and distress migration especially in rural areas.

In the field of energy, India continues to face the challenge of providing basic energy access to huge sections of the population. In search of alternate technologies that would bridge this gap with solutions that are affordable and sustainable, activists, institutions and social movements have put forward initiatives around micro-hydel, solar lighting, biomass-based cooking and energy saving building technologies. Given the fact that these are 'disruptive' technologies that require user capability development, continuous technology improvement and local network development, it is important that peoples' groups ensure that their technologies and organisational forms counter the corporate takeover of renewable energy expansion.

Alternatives in agriculture, led by peasant organisations and peoples science movements have matured over the last decade. Agro-ecological approaches are now beginning to be considered as a viable alternative. These include experiments on bio-farming, biological pest management practices, system of rice intensification (SRI), bio-char, soil fertility management, participatory water management and bio-mass for rural industries.

Further, appropriate technologies that are women friendly such as paddy transplanters, winnowers, weeders, threshers and seeders have reduced labour drudgery. New organisational forms include initiatives such as women's collectives, labour cooperatives and associations of water users that ensure rights to dalits and other marginal communities.

Input supply, processing and direct marketing to the consumers through seed centric service cooperatives are being tried out with the aim to protect the sustainable livelihoods of farm producers and to ensure the nation's food security.

In the area of fisheries, appropriate technology innovations for the upgrading of traditional crafts and creation of cooperatives allowed fishworkers to survive the onslaught of large trawlers in the 1980s. Co-management of fast depleting marine resources is a new challenge looming for which new policies and institutional arrangements are required, and trade unions and traditional fisherfolk communities are pursuing these.

In a situation of continuing rural poverty, declining employment in agriculture, increasing distress migration, and "jobless growth" in the industrial sector, groups are increasingly realizing the importance of rural non-farm enterprises for sustainable livelihoods. These efforts are aimed at maximizing benefits for primary producers, especially small and marginal farmers, artisans, agricultural labour, women and poor rural youth by value-addition to rural produce which generate additional incomes and jobs,

Experts have shown new/improved technologies and models for viable and self-sustaining rural enterprises have been developed in many sectors such as agro-processing, processing of horticultural produce, meat and fish processing, value-addition to various wild produce and non-timber forest produce, non-edible oils, leather tanning and products, pottery, plant-based fibres and soaps and detergents. Innovative organisational forms including worker-owned and/or managed enterprises and cooperatives have been evolved to empower workers and small entrepreneurs. Rural markets have been strengthened in this process. Efforts are also underway to scale up, upgrade and adapt these technologies and enterprises to better perform in rural and urban markets that are seeing increased domination by MNCs and large domestic corporations.

Groups at the Thrissur conference reiterated and renewed their commitment to ensuring every citizen's fundamental rights, to enhance equity in national development, and to ecological sustainability. While advancing alternative technologies and organisational forms towards these goals, scaling up efforts require continuous collaboration of social movements and other civil society groups with scientific and academic institutions to broaden the base and capacity for innovation. Engagement with state agencies is necessary in order to bring about requisite policy changes and to mainstream these pro-people innovations and integrate them with governmental development programmes.

## SOLIDARITY THEATRE

"Our country's history is mired with occupations. Our journey in the Freedom Theatre has been to create, through our art, a resistance against the occupation."

Sibi Arasu interviews Palestinian actor-activists Faisal Abu-Alheija and Ahmad Al-Rokh while they were in Delhi.

Invited to perform at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala in Thrissur in January 2015, actor-activists Faisal Abu-Alheija (FA) and Ahmad Al-Rokh (AR) of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, Palestine were also in Delhi. They were hosted by Indian theatre group Jana Natya Manch. The Palestinian duo spoke to Sibi Arasu on the sidelines of the screening of the documen-

tary Arna's Children.

**Freedom Theatre began in 2006. What has your journey been like?**

FA: Theatre or art in Palestine is not easy to find. Our country's history is mired with occupations and intifadas. Our journey in the Freedom Theatre has been to create, through our art, a resistance against the occupation.

**What is the idea behind Freedom Theatre?**

AR: The main goal is creating resistance. We take stories from people, people suffering, resisting every day, this is part of the resistance. Also, we are people under occupation and all international laws say, people under occupation have the right to resist that occupation.

**Can you comment on theatre**

**and war, the relationship between the two?**

FA: Many houses in the camp have been destroyed many times over, our houses included. As we say there, sometimes we don't die and sometimes we do. But until we are alive, we can work towards keeping our soul, our identity alive. There's no safety there. But theatre is a kind of protection. Our work

protects and makes us alive. If you tell a story well, it'll live a hundred years.

**You have friends fighting with guns and, on the other hand, your way is theatre.**

AR: We are freedom fighters too. Art is dangerous; in the history of Palestine, we have many artists who have gotten killed – the cartoonist Naji Al Ali, Ghassan Kana-fani, the writer, our co-founder, Juliano Mer Khemis. I have lost many cousins and friends. They say the first intifada was with the stone, the second intifada was with the guns and this is my intifada.



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In English, 'Beti Zindabad!' translates to 'Long-live daughters!'



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## SOLAR PANELS & SOLIDARITY

P Sainath writes about the adivasi women of Edamalakudi, a small village in India's southern most state of Kerala. These women have formed a headload workers' group, helped light up their villages with solar power, and are practicing group farming in wild elephants' territory. Almost all of them are members of Kerala's extraordinary anti-poverty and gender justice movement – Kudumbashree.

When 60 women in Edamalakudi carried about a hundred solar panels on their heads across 18 kilometres of hill, forest and wild elephant territory, they made history of sorts. In this, Kerala's remotest panchayat or elected village council, there is no electricity. Solar panels and batteries are the only power source for the 240 families of this cut-off region. You can even run the odd television set on that power.

When the village panchayat acted – partly under their prodding – to try and reach solar power to all, these women took on the task. They picked up and brought the panels, each weighing up to 9 kilograms, across hostile, hilly, up-and-down terrain between Pettimudi and here. On foot. There is no other way to reach Edamalakudi, Kerala's first tribal panchayat, in Idukki district. They had formed a 'Chumattu koottam' (headload workers group), riling local male porters who had enjoyed a monopoly over such work.

All the women are adivasis (India's 'first dwellers' comprising hundreds of tribes). All are members of the Muthavan tribe. And almost all are active members of Kudumbashree, Kerala's extraordinary anti-poverty and gender justice movement, with nearly four million women members.

"It took nine hours," smiles Ramani Arjunan, Chairperson of the panchayat's Kudumbashree units. (The women mostly refer to their movement as "CDS" – community development society). "Some of the stronger ones carried two panels on their heads. Others just one at a time. You have seen the route yourselves and you know it

was not easy. But we did it."

"We got Rs. 85 per panel," says Ramani. "And another Rs.180 since the work was done for the panchayat and qualified for the daily wage of Rs. 180 under the NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme)." So those who carried two panels made Rs. 350. Hardly great money for that kind of gruelling labour. But still, more cash than they would earn on most days in the year in this isolated region. They're ready to take on more such work, says Ramani. She is gentle, soft-spoken, yet clearly a strong leader.

But the Kudumbashree or 'CDS' groups of Edamalakudi do far more challenging things. They practice 'group farming' in small plots. They are focused on food crops and, in those, on organic farming. They also practice shifting cultivation. "No, we use no chemical fertiliser." Also "We have not cut any trees."

It's incredibly hard work. But they are successful farmers. Only, this is jungle, and elephants, wild boars and other animals raid their rich crops regularly. A high-risk livelihood anywhere, farming here has the added element of physical danger. Since this is forest land, they also have no pattas (title deeds) and will not get them. Yet the demarcation of plots by boundaries invisible to all but the adivasis, works well for them. There is no conflict.

"There are 40 CDS groups in Edamalakudi," says Ramani. "Of these 34 are into farming. Each group has five members or families involved." Sitting alongside her are about 30 other Kudumbashree members, chipping in with their own comments. There's Shanti Shivam, Kamakshi Devendran, Kausalya Loganani, Malliga Muthupandi, and many others. Different voices speak.

"Our farming groups (krishi sanghas) grow ragi, paddy and other food crops. We also grow some tapioca and plantains." Some even do a bit of natural cultivation of cardamom. "But overwhelmingly, we grow food crop."

"The crops came along very well. Things were good. But there were two problems. One: the wild animals who ravaged 50 per cent of our first crop. Two: for any surplus, where's the market? We have to walk through 18-km of wild elephant territory to reach one."

How vital is the market? "We are clear that our first aim is to feed our families. Only if

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### SOLIDARITY THEATRE

**Do they consider yours a lesser fight?**

AR: We are freedom fighters too. Art is dangerous; in the history of Palestine, we have many artists who have gotten killed – the cartoonist Naji Al Ali, Ghassan Kana-fani, the writer, our co-founder, Juliano Mer Khemis. I have lost many cousins and friends. They say the first intifada was with the stone, the second intifada was with the guns and this is my intifada.

**Do you travel often outside the West Bank?**

FA: Not a lot, but we do travel, especially to other theatre festivals like the one we have come for. We are an exception though, for most Palestinians it's impossible to get out even, especially to other parts of our country. It's easier for us to come here than to go to Gaza.

*Many houses in the camp have been destroyed many times over, our houses included. As we say there, sometimes we don't die and sometimes we do. But until we are alive, we can work towards keeping our soul, our identity alive. There's no safety there. But theatre is a kind of protection. Our work protects and makes us alive. If you tell a story well, it'll live a hundred years.*



Photo Credit: www.upsides.com (Photo is merely representational)

there is something left over would we take that to market. However, that part also helps us. It gives us the money to buy other things we need. But there's no access road. No transportation."

"We need a bank branch here. Just a handful of us have bank accounts." This is, for Kerala, a rare village council whose President has only recently learned to sign her name. But the women seem confident they can operate bank accounts. The CDS groups here raised well over half a million rupees from their activities and savings which they lodged in a fixed deposit in a public sector bank. No market-linked investment for them.

Which is more important to them: group farming? Or individual farming? Both have a role, they say.

"Group farming is better," says Ramani, as many around her nod in agreement. "In collective functioning, if one person falls behind, the others will help her manage." "I like to do individual farming, too," says another woman. "That has its own rewards. But this way helps us feed our families better. As a group, there are other effects beyond farming. Members become a source of support and solidarity for each other. This spills over into family life as well. That is very important to us. So why should we not do both?"

Prof. Ananya Mukherjee of York University, Toronto, has written on the innovative approach to food security of these groups. "Some 2,50,000 Kudumbashree women throughout Kerala have come together to form farming collectives which jointly lease land, cultivate it, use the produce to meet their consumption needs and sell the surplus to local markets. "This," she points out, "increases the participation of women in agriculture... (and) ensures that women, as producers, have control over the production, distribution and consumption of food."

The women of Edamalakudi do all of this

under the most difficult conditions.

"Would you prefer," we ask, "to see yourselves as producers, or as labourers? As paid workers?" Every single one of them wishes to be seen, and sees herself, as a producer.

One more thing, we ask Ramani. "You say that, as the tribal people of these lands, you should control the forests. That the new road being planned will kill the forest and destroy the Muthavans. At the same time you complain that you have to trudge 18-km each way to get produce to the market. For that you say you wish you had a road. Isn't that contradictory?"

"Not at all," says Ramani. "We are not asking for an open highway. We seek a fully-controlled 'jeep road' to which there is restricted access. Controlled under forest law, it will limit access to miners, timber seekers and other outsiders. We would not be overrun. But we would have access to market."

Now it is getting dark and many of the women who have come to the 'Societykudi' from other, far-off hamlets, must leave. They have a long trek to do through the jungle in poor light.

Our band of eight wanderers had trudged those fall 18-km to arrive here exhausted. Even though we carried no solar panels on our heads. We had come here all the way just to talk these extraordinary 'CDS' groups. Kerala's Minister for Local Administration M.K. Muneer had told us in Thiruvananthapuram, the state's capital, that the groups of Edamalakudi were special even by Kudumbashree standards. I was a little sceptical, then. You need to be, when a minister is praising efforts falling within his own portfolio. After meeting the women of Edamalakudi, however, you might think maybe he was understating their achievements.

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**Tell us about some of your productions?**

AR: Our Kerala play is called The Island. It relates to South African prison systems. Other productions are an adaptation of Alice in Wonderland and Animal Farm. The latter was quite controversial. After it was performed in 2008, they tried to burn our theatre twice. There's a new one called Suicide Theatre from Palestine.

**Who are your audiences?**

AR: We are beginning to have more audiences not only in Jenin but all of Palestine. Because people are afraid, there is misunderstanding of Islam, there are many other obstacles for our work. We do succeed sometimes and have a great audience, especially children.

**What about funding?**

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