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Shrinking Democracy, rights and entitlements- A three day convention on Right to Food

Right To food network organized a three day convention demanding right to food for all and universalization of Public Distribution System in the country in order to fight against poverty and hunger. More than 2500 people from 16 States including UP, Bihar, Gujrat, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Telengana, Manipur ,Uttarkhand and others participated in the convention from 23rd-25th September 2016 at Ranchi, Jharkhand.

The convention was inaugurated by a rally with a slogans like“HaatonkoKaamrahe- koi nabeekarrahe”(Every individual should be employed-no person should be unemployed), Jal JaungleaurZameenHojantakeAdhin(Land, water and jungle should be in the hands of people). “Employment and poverty are deeply knitted with each other and we should claim right to food and right to employment side by side” said AshafiNand, Convener, Right To Food Campaign, Jharkhand. Renowned Adivasi leader SoniSori depicted the situation of Bastar, Chattisgarh where the adivasis are fighting for their democratic rights and fundamental rights which are systematically violated by the State authorities. Jean Dreze, visiting Professor of Ranchi University and veteran activist advocated for the universalization of Public Distribution System. Bezwada Wilson from Safai Karmachari Andolon regretted that” Participation and voices of the unorganized workers are never reflected in the policy document of the country”. Discussion held focussing intersection of Tuberculosis and Right to Food. Various other cross sections issues which is linkage to food security and differently abeled people homelessness etc. was also discussed in various sessions. Delegates from various states shared their shrinking rights especially from Kashmir, Manipur and Nagaland.

Durbar as a core member of Right to Food network actively participated in the convention along with other unorganized workers including Rag Pickers, ICDS workers, Adivasis, agricultural workers, daily wage earners etc. The convention came to an end with a demand for autonomous local administration instead of State control over people’s resources. ‘To reclaim space in this shrinking democracy all movements should come under one platform to console date and strengthen raise people’s voices’, said Kanhaiya Kumar the student leader who created a positive vibe among the participants.

Regional workshop on “Trafficking of Persons Bill 2016”

All India network of Sex Workers, CREA, Lawyer’s Collective and Centre For Advocacy and Research organized a day long consultation on 19th September 2016 on Trafficking of Persons Bill 2016 where more than 80 sex workers from Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal participated.

The objective of the consultative workshop is to generate awareness among the sex workers about the draft bill to get their responses on the same so that their recommendation can be incorporated. Tripty Tandon from Lawyer’s Collective discussed various provisions of the draft bill. “If this bill along with the present Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act being enforced, lives and livelihoods of the sex workers will be endangered” she said with grave concern. The said bill expands the scope of trafficking in sex work and in other occupations as well but it penalizes “trafficking of persons for child bearing” which can create confusions with surrogacy.

In the discussion the sex workers came up with various suggestions and recommendations for the draft bill to make it more “living act” for the community. They advocated for sex worker’s representation and participation in the district level committees to prevent trafficking while in the present act there is no such scope. They also strongly recommended that “trafficking” and “sex work by choice” should be distinctly defined. “Rehabilitation should be designed as per the choice and requirement of the individual and forced rehabilitation also a violation of human rights” said Kusum- on behalf of AINSW.

“We also condemn trafficking, child sex work, forced and coerced sex work and through what we have been addressed the Self-Regulatory Board an unique mechanism to prevent trafficking which is also been appreciated by the Supreme court of Constituted Panel of India. We have been able to separate 1100 minor girls and unwilling women from the sex trade”-said Bharati Dey the Mentor of Durbar who also functioned as a member of the Supreme Court panel on trafficking and sex work.

There will be three more consultations on various regions of India including Southern, Western and Northern part of India and all the recommendations will be compiled together and will be send to women’s Commissions of various States and national Women’s commission in addition to sending letter to Ministry of WCD.

Entrepreneurship development programme for the sex workers and their children

Union Bank, the renowned nationalized bank extended their support and expertise for entrepreneurship development among the sex workers and their children. Through a planned programme the bank will first provide vocational training on the subjects like Computer literacy course on, Beautician, Mobile repairing, Sewing, tailoring, Driving etc. In the second phase of the programme the bank will provide seed money as loan to start business.

“In the red light district like Sonagachi every lady undergo through beauty treatment and thus there is huge demand for it. If I get the seed money to start business, I will buy my own equipment and materials and will cater the need of the locality” said Sangita who enrolled her name under the beautician course. The programme is for the adult and primarily for the unemployed youth. The basic objective of the programme is not only creating earning options rather it will help building confidence and self-esteem among the participants.

“We have tried to understand about the need of the community through a couple of planning meetings and decided to organize in house training for the participants nearer to the red light district” commented the bank official of Union Bank.

“Presently more than 31 sex workers and children of sex workers are enrolled” said Ms. Puja Roy, Secretary, AmraPadatik who is in charge of the programme.

DMSC participated in the fourth general council of NTUI

New Trade Union Initiative(NTUI) is a trade union by and for the unorganized workers formed in 2001. Binodini Sramik Union (the trade union wing of Durbar) is one of its affiliate organization. NTUI organizes its general council after every four year and this year it organized its 4th general council at Jan Bikas Kendra, Patel Bagan, Jamsedpur from 23rd-25th September 2016.

About 300 delegates representing about 100 affiliates from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujrat, Hariyana, Jammu Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharastra, Punjab, Tamil nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal participated in the convention.

In the convention, workers from various occupations including anganwadi Workers, Safai Karmachari, Asha Workers, Garment and Tailoring workers, Mine workers, Sugar Mill workers, Sex workers, Domestic workers etc.; interacted, discussed and exchanged their trade related issues and challenges.

The council evaluated the impact of 2nd September General Strike held against the government policy to disempower working forces in the country. Various sessions and discussion were held on focussing minimum wage of the worker, where the worker representatives shared that only a handful workers are covered under the Minimum Wage Act (1948) leaving behind numerous unorganized workers from its purview. The delegates from Jharkhand discussed about the proposed amendment of Chotonagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act which is a direct attack on the Adivasis living in the state. "Proposed amendment in the Factories Act, 1948 and Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1952 will increase the vulnerability of the workers in organized sector." Said Goutam Modi, General Secretary NTUI.

"Our fight continues for the right to association as workers" said Ms. Sima Phokla, a sex workers representative from Kolkata. As the government refused to register Binodini Sramik Union (the organisation of entertainment workers) under Trade Union Act 1926 saying that it will not be covered under the definition of Trade under the said act or "industry" under the Industrial Dispute Act. "If we do not fight for our rights numbers of unorganized worker's collectives may not be registered under the Trade Union Act" Sima concluded.

A Consultative workshop on Domestic Workers at workplace

A consultative workshop was organized on 19.09.16 at ICMARD, Ultadanga on status of schemes and benefits, acts, access to land, adequate housing for urban poor, minimum wages, weekly holidays, and medical assistance, safety of the workers at workplace and living conditions. The consultation was started with the opening words of the Secretary of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee Ms. Kajol Bose. She focused on the importance of collectivization. She suggested Disha has to be strengthened to reinforce their rights to access minimum wage, medical assistance, and social security measures etc. They have to raise their voice collectively for getting their recognition as labor and proper dignity in the society.

Ms. Arpita Das from National Livelihood Mission also associated with Kalyani Municipality mentions that Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation introduces Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana for reducing poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self employment and skilled wage employment opportunities.

Under NULM, street vendors will be encouraged to access other social security benefits available to them through various schemes of the Government of India such as RSBY, basic banking services, skill trainings etc.

Mr. Anibrata Pramanik from Shristi, Kolkata facilitated on urban housing for poor. He begins with the Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana (VAMBAY) that was launched in December 2001 to ameliorate the conditions of the urban slum dwellers living below the poverty line without adequate shelter. He also discussed about other schemes like Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation

(AMRUT), etc. He suggested Disha to submit a joint application in the municipality to get the benefit of housing schemes.

He also focussed the light on the distressed condition of the urban poor people who lives in the pavement and regularly exploited by the police, anti-socials, common people, changing weather etc. The housing scheme also covers these people.

Ms. Kakuli Deb from Parichiti shared her views about the living condition and workplace of the domestic workers. There is no fixed salary pattern of the workers. She suggested that a minimum wage should be fixed along with the weekly holidays and medical assistance.

Aparna Chatterjee Roy from DALSA, Kolkata High Court facilitated on the Schemes for the labour of unrecognised sector.

Sudhanshu Chatterjee from Durbar explained maternity leave facility and the different maternity benefits and schemes. He also explained about the importance of anti-natal and post-natal care for the mother. .

Ms. Rama Debnath from Karmajibi Mahila Parishad and Mr. Rabindranath Chakraborty from Sramajibi Swikriti Mancha gave their valuable opinions in favour of domestic workers. Mr. Chakraborty suggested Disha to implement two types of strategies: filing RTI, petitions for the rights of the workers and regular visit the Govt. Departments and law makers.

Program ended with the speech of Moumita Naskar, Secretary of Durbar Disha. She thanked everyone for sharing their valuable opinions. She said that being domestic worker she faces various problems even though she is one of the office bearers of the domestic worker's movement.

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