

## REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON SOCIAL SECURITY HELD ON APRIL 10, 2007 AT ISI, NEW DELHI

The National Consultation on social security for Unorganised Workers held on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2007 in the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, was attended by about one hundred representatives of Trade Unions, Peoples Movements, NGOs and academicians. In the day long sessions they deliberated on impact of government economic policies on informal workers, recent government draft bills, strategies and action plan to mobilize unorganised workers for building up a movement to pursue for comprehensive social security for unorganised informal workers.

In the keynote address Professor Amit Bhaduri, an eminent economist stated that unorganised workers produce food grains and goods, construct the country, provide basic services and amenities to people but they have no political voice and no fighting power. If any one who deserve the right of social security most it is unorganised workers. They are exploited and so arduously engaged in earning their bread and butter that they do not have time and energy to organise. Their compulsion for earning their next meal keep them away from raising collective voice. Besides they are dispersed in vast area, their nature of occupations, skills and works are different, there are divisions between unorganised workers. Their circumstances in Kerala are different then the circumstances in Haryana or Punjab. Therefore social security protection for different groups of workers should be different.

Professor Amit Bhaduri said unless employment or livelihoods are ensured and protected social security will have no meaning. Employment or livelihood is the main social security for them. He said that full employment in the economy is very much possible. Prof. Bhaduri also emphasized that there was no alternative to unions. There should be an alternate forum where unionization happens—based on occupation. There should then be a 2<sup>nd</sup> level developed for coordination between various unions. Professor Amit Bhaduri said that social security should be linked with employment. We should demand minimum comprehensive social security for all unorganised workers until full employment is achieved.

Mr J John of CEC gave the background of this consultation meeting stating that the process initiated in Nagpur in the month of October 2006 is being taken forward. He said that in Nagpur representatives of trade unions, NGOs, Peoples organizations and many other groups decided certain non-negotiables and issued 'Nagpur Declaration. He emphasized that job security and employment regulation are essential components of social security. Now we have to build the demand for social security into a peoples movement because unless unorganised workers initiate and lead the movement they will not get comprehensive social security. He said that in this consultation meeting we

would examine recent government bills, deliberate on strategies and action plan and try to form larger alliances.

Who is poor in India? Poor are not unemployed. Those who are employed in the informal sector are poor. Poor are the dalits and adivasies, who are employed in the informal sector. There are only 4% unemployed in India. However there are 30 crores poor. Therefore, informal sector employed people are poor. The quality of work of informal and unorganised workers has been deteriorating. The increasing informal and unorganised workers, number of small farmers, number of rural workers, increase in contract labour, with all round incidences of long hours of work, non payment or less payment of wages (less than minimum wages), atrocities on women workers, unsafe working conditions, gender discrimination in wages, ignoring skill development and absence of social security and absence of organisations make people poor and exploited.

Mr John said after independence in 1947 we enacted laws to control exploitation, to regulate employment and to ensure labour rights. Wage regulations and social security are important for distribution of wealth and national income. Constitution of India, ILO conventions, and International Covenant on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) prescribes social security as citizenship right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides that everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security. If we as citizen don't have work and have no social security how can we live? This is a right to life issue.

Dr R S Tiwari of CEC gave an outline of the developments after Nagpur Convention stating that in Nagpur we resolved to hold regional and state level conventions/workshops. The consortium submitted memorandum to Union Labour Minister, Planning commission members, Chairman, National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganised Sector and other concerned ministries for an appropriate comprehensive law and as demanded by trade unions in a joint meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006 in Delhi.

The state level and regional conventions have been held during January-March 2007 in Bhopal, Bangalore, Chennai, Guwahati, Umariya, Ranchi, Rajnandgaon (C.H.) and in other places for which reports are awaited. The consortium also distributed hand-outs, displayed posters, sent post cards to local M.Ps. and M.L.As., and undertook a signature campaign etc throughout the country. Other organizations (NGOs and Peoples Movements) who attended Nagpur convention, have organised meetings, rallies and other ways of expressing their protests against government apathy towards unorganised workers. He also informed the consortium joined the Action-2007 movement and participated in public meetings, dharnas and met various authorities/ministers to pursue social security protection for unorganised workers.

## Session II

Comrade H Mahadevan of AITUC said that it is a myth that Central Trade Unions are working for organised workers only. AITUC had organised unorganised

workers from the very beginning since its formation. It is historical fact. Only unorganised were organised by AITUC. We still work for organizing the unorganised workers. The CTUs organised a workshop on 18/19 October 2006 and resolved for a comprehensive bill on social security of unorganised workers. He said AITUC organised a large scale rally on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006 in which over 1.5 lakh unorganised workers participated. On 14<sup>th</sup> December the general strike also demanded for social security of unorganised workers. The AITUC has been demanding comprehensive law for agriculture workers. Comrade Mahadevan expressed the need for emphasizing decent work as described by ILO, national notified minimum wage for contract labour, labour rights and social security for IT workers. He demanded the withdrawal of the Bill on Fixed Term Employment from parliament.

Mr Subhash Bhatnager of NCC-USW said that his organization stands for social security with regulation of employment. He said that with Action 2007 group we met Labour Minister and Planning Commission members to pursue for social security law for unorganised workers. He questioned whether we should accept whatever law is proposed by government.

Mr Jeeva of National Center for Labour said that the NCL demanded for a comprehensive law incorporating employment protection, regulation and dispute resolution with labour rights. We drafted a bill which was comprehensive and it included labour rights, details of social security and employment protection. The NCL demanded for 50 per cent of last drawn wages as pension. There are different minimum wages, with wide gap in the states and central minimum wages. We know that unorganised workers do not get work for many days. How we will regulate their employment. Mr Jeeva said that tactically we support a bill on social security even if it does not regulate employment. We will have a tool in our hand.

Ms Pratibha Shinde a tribal activist of Lok Sangharsh Morcha stated that the social security law should have employment-linked social security. She said that we compromised during NREGA and accepted 100 days of employment per able bodied person per household and we can observe the impacts of this. There is no improvement in anyone's life. We therefore should make sure that we get comprehensive legislation on social security and not give in this time.

Dr Onkar Sharma said that a comprehensive draft law may be prepared and introduced in the parliament as private member Bill. He said there will be no transparency in the working of boards if the board is constituted.

### Session III

Initiating the discussions on Strategies Mr J John said that we need to target next two budget sessions while planning for the campaign. We have to go ahead from the status of a consortium to the status of a movement. How shall we make this transition?

Ms Medha Patkar of NAPM asked why not to target this remaining budget session of the parliament why wait for two budget sessions. She suggested that one Jatha may go round the states for nation wide campaign for social security law and to reach to MPs, MLAs, Village Panchayati Raj institutions. We should begin a signature campaign. She said the lawyers should also have one voice on issues of inequalities, livelihood, employment and social security. Our non-negotiables should be similar. Medha suggested to develop very simple, easy to follow Hindi and regional language booklets on various social security issues. A few symbols (*prateek*) should be created. There should be a detailed planning, programme and strategy.

Mr P Ravindranathan said that as struggle gains momentum doubts will be cleared. He said that if we have to develop concepts, we have to develop organizations from struggles. The AITUC organised workers but we were not aware, all this took time. Consortium to movement should be the process of uniting, networking and alliance building. It should be a broader platform.

Mr Rajesh Malaviya of NIWCYD stated that we should be clear for whom we need social security and by whom it will be funded and administered. He said that we need to plan our strategy carefully for different areas/ regions.

Mr MJ Vijayan of Delhi Forum said we have to determine non-negotiables. Consortium has to go beyond to outreach people. Unless you are with the people you do not get mandate to negotiate. With Action-2007 and consortium a process in right direction began. How we take it ahead is to be considered. We have to think if it is the right time to change to a movement.

Mr Pradhuman Bora of ISI said that we should develop new capsules for regional media. In Guwahati Social Security Convention grass root level participants attended the convention. Now we can do village level, local regional level meetings.

Ms Priti Darooka of PWESCR spoke on communication strategy which we need to adopt in our campaign so as to out reach to masses in an effective and inspiring manner. We should have a common language on social security. We might have differences, however, should agree on a few non-negotiables. We need to develop some symbols to have a common identity. She stressed developing short book-lets in regional languages, street plays, puppet shows, posters, slogans, songs etc. We also need to consider how shall we communicate within our group and partners. We may develop our web site and listserv to stay connected.

Mr Arun Khote of NCDHR said that concerns of dalit workers in unorganised sector need to be prominently described in all our efforts and documents. Generally we see only social aspects of dalits and their economic and livelihood concerns are not addressed. Till now dalits are engaged in their social identity issue. The dalit social security mass movement programme would make them aware of their social security rights.

Ms Cheryl Deutsch of National Hawkers Federation said there are over 40 million hawkers and venders in the country. They are everywhere; in villages, in cities in trains etc. They need to be recognized as workers. Their work need to be recognized as service. Problems of women hawkers are to be studied. She emphasized that in the new Urban policy of the government the social security of hawkers should be considered. She said that national level meetings are necessary for considering various important issues relating to hawkers and venders.

*A few participants intervened to give their suggestions and sought clarifications from speakers. In this interactive session consensus on various issues emerged and in concluding session these were detailed.*

### Concluding Session

Mr J. John of CEC identified common points on theme, issues and processes emerging from the day's proceedings. Subsequently after point-wise discussions, the group took following decisions as a way forward:

- i) To organise a consultation to arrive at non-negotiables.
- ii) To adopt Common identity and Message.
- iii) To prepare Popular campaign material in regional languages and to develop songs, street plays and other cultural expressions.
- iv) To prepare Symbols. In all the above efforts, to incorporate dalits, Adivasi and gender concerns in the articulations on social security.
- v) To strengthen Inter-organisation communication- sharing and co-ordination (web-site).
- vi) To establish Linkages with Trade Unions, peoples movements; dalit, adivasi, women organizations.
- vii) To launch A programme to reach out to 500 districts in India within one year.
- viii) To Broaden the consortium by incorporating new members.

### Campaign Name

The participants unanimously decided on 'SOCIAL SECURITY NOW' as the name of the campaign for comprehensive social security of unorganised and informal workers in India.

### *Organisational Structure*

1. National Alliance and Campaign

‘SOCIAL SECURITY NOW’ in which all who agree on non-negotiables of the campaign will be members.

## 2. Working Group

The original Consortium and the following names from the participants of the consultation.

- (i) Ms Cheryl Deutsch of National Hawkers Federation
- (ii) South Asian Dialogue on Vizyan Foundation, Lukhnow
- (iii) Nirmala Niketan
- (iv) South Asian Study Centre
- (v) National Hawker’s Federation
- (vi) Delhi Shramik Sangathan, Delhi
- (vii) Ms Pratibha Shinde, Lok Sangharsh Morcha
- (viii) Nidan, Patna