



# The Meeting Point

A Quarterly Newsletter of AREDS

*The smallest good deed is better than the grandest good intension*

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## Special Resolutions for Gram Sabha meetings:

To conduct gram sabha (the village assembly) is mandatory according to the Panchayat Raj Institution Act. So, prior to the gram sabha meeting that was commenced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2010, a meeting of panchayat presidents was convened on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, for discussing the resolutions that were to be included in the gram sabha meetings.

**Objective of the meeting:** To motivate the panchayat presidents to pass certain specific resolutions on the day of Gram Sabha that is going to take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2010.

This is the follow up of the decisions taken in the meeting of Forum for Livelihood Right of Karur district held on 25.08.2010, in which staff and representatives from **AREDS, Makkal Valvurimai Iyakkam, TRALM – CTU, SWATE, DRALM, KADALU and PDM participated.**

It was decided to pass the following resolutions in the gram sabha meetings to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2010 in the panchayats of Karur district.

## Resolutions:

- ❖ People Welfare Worker and Panchayat Clerk supervise the MNREGS works being executed in the field. Virtually, taking attendance, allocating works and other technical things cause much delay in executing the works. Therefore, separate persons - one person against 100 workers - must be selected among the MNREGS workers themselves to monitor the MNREGS works.
- ❖ The main objectives of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural employment Guarantee Act is to check hunger deaths and migration of people. But, the curtailment in the MNREGS wages does help realize the objectives. Therefore, the MNREGS workers must be paid the legal minimum wages Rs.100 for one man-day.
- ❖ The government should allocate certain amount from the MNREGS fund for procuring tools and instruments and providing worksite facilities.

Besides, an exclusive resolution for total prohibition of liquor was also pushed by the villagers during the gram sabha meeting.

## Outcome:

- The resolutions on the MNREGS are unanimously passed in almost all the panchayats.

- Only a few panchayats passed the resolution for total prohibition.

#### **Comments:**

There is a ludicrous politics behind this. Congress party-led government enacted the MNREGA in 2005 and so, Congress party claims the scheme as if it is the party-designed scheme. Here in Tamil Nadu, most of the panchayat heads are party members of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which is the ruling party in Tamil Nadu state. They do not have a sense of ownership over the MNREGS. So, most of the presidents passed whatever resolutions that spoke about changes or alterations in the MNREGS.

In the same manner, the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) is the liquor producing and selling agency of the Tamil Nadu state government. Since many of the presidents belong to DMK party, the resolution for total prohibition was not passed in most of the panchayats but in panchayats headed by the presidents belonging to Congress party.

The Congress party presidents included the government's agenda in their gram sabha meeting and passed resolution on the total prohibition of liquor.

The presidents belonging to DMK passed resolutions on the MNREGS and excluded the resolution for total prohibition.

The MNREGS is perceived more as a Congress party's programme than as the government's programmes by the panchayat presidents and the Tamil Nadu government officials. That is the reason for the lethargic implementation of the scheme in many areas in Tamil Nadu.

#### **[The Members of Tuir Thalir Students' Movement \(TTSM\) learn folk arts:](#)**

**A** two-day training on folk arts was organized for the TTSM members at the AREDS Training Centre – Aravanampet, on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2010.

**28.09.2010:**

Dissemination of ideas is effective in its outreach when it is done in the form of street theatre/cultural programmes. AREDS strongly believes in it and disseminates its ideology and undertakes propaganda on the programmes and interventions it undertakes, through cultural activities. It has a cultural team right from the beginning. Mr. Senthikumar explained the above said history and the objective of the training programme to the children.

Eight of the participants were trained on 'paraiyattam' and the other eight were trained on 'karakattam', which are typical Tamil folk arts. Mr. Thamilselvan and Mr. Abi Mannan trained the children on paraiyattam and Ms. Divya trained the other children on karakattam in the forenoon.



In the evening, the children who underwent karakattam were trained on paraiyattam and vice versa. 'Kummi' song and dance, which is also a folk art of Tamil people, was taught to all of the children.

**29.09.2010:**

Simple exercises were taught to the children early in the morning. Then, as apart of exercise and training, different steps in kummi were taught to them.

Then, eight of the children, who performed well in karakattam were identified and trained effectively on karakattam. The other eight children were trained on paraiyattam. In the afternoon session, the theme on child right was dealt with. The children enthusiastically participated in learning child rights and related social issues.

**Outcome:**

- Children became aware of the importance of preserving the folk arts and the kinds of folk arts
- The children learnt the basics of karakattam and paraiyattam
- They also learnt kummi song and dance
- Fellowship among the children developed
- It was useful in forming a cultural team with children

**Decisions taken:**

- The same children will meet once in a month and undergo training on different items of cultural activities
- More members are to be included in the team for paraiyattam
- To organize children's cultural programme on the Anti-Child Labour Day this is to be conducted in May 2011.

**State level Consultation on building up a Coalition on Land Rights**

Pursuing the efforts in building up a coalition on the Land Right and the Local Governance, a state level two-day meeting was organised at Trichy on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2010.



Mr. Nicholas from CCFD participated as a special observer.

Different tactics for asserting the right of the dalits and the oppressed communities over land were expressed by the participants:

- Undertaking a wider-level campaign on land right
- Organising a series of dialogue with various people's movements
- Strengthening of the local governance
- Organising more consultation meetings, with the people affected by land grabbing drive, on alternative measures, demands, statistics on land deprivation, short term and long term movements and the like

- Making a scientific study on the kinds, availability and the utility of lands and on the lands that are to be redistributed by the government and making a comprehensive lobby document
- First of all, a state level organizing body must be formed to lead the movement. In the same manner district level bodies must also be formed for integrating the people deprived of land right
- Imparting political awareness to the people
- We must organize movements, demanding abolition of Land Acquisition Act 1999 and SEZ Act
- Organising a state level consultation on abolition of Land Acquisition Act 1999 and SEZ Act
- Organising a state level public hearing with the people deprived of land right and with the people affected by forced eviction
- Understanding the motive/objective behind the land grabbing drive of the government is a must. Hence, organizing more consultation meetings is necessary

#### **Salient points:**

- ❖ A state level committee is to be formed to conduct and guide the movement for asserting the land right of the dalits and the oppressed communities
- ❖ More movements that have been fighting for the land right of the oppressed communities, must be included with the forum so that the land right movement will become stronger
- ❖ Region-wise campaign must be undertaken in order to create widespread awareness on land right among people
- ❖ Organising a campaign demanding withdrawal of Land Acquisition Act 1999 and SEZ Act is important
- ❖ A state level campaign on land right and against Land Acquisition Act 1999 and SEZ Act must be done before the forth coming assembly election

#### **Name given to the Coalition: Tamil Nadu Land Right Federation (TLRF)**

The following are the members of the State Organising Committee of the Forum for Land Right:

#### **Follow-up:**

- The members of the State Organising Committee of the TLRF met on 20.10.2010 at ICSA – Chennai for shaping up the committee and making a plan of action.
- All 30 districts of Tamil Nadu have been divided into five zones and Mr. L. A Samy of AREDS is the convenor for Trichy zone that comprises Trichy, Karur, Perambalur and Ariyalur districts.
- Trichy zonal meeting was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2010 at Trichy. It has been decided to make a study on the volume of fertile lands grabbed by the government and the corporate sectors for establishing Special Economic Zones and make a list of supporting organizations possible to join the Tamil Nadu Land Rights Federation.

#### **Statewide Demonstration of Unorganised Workers**

**T**he unorganized workers constitute 93% of the total worker population of India and they accomplish 65% of the domestic production. Though, not even 3% of the central budget is allocated for their welfare. Employment guarantee, regular payment and social protection are most uncertain to them. Further, they work in a hazardous situation for more than eight hours and woman workers face sexual abuse at the work places.

In addition, through the Government Order 23, the unorganized workers have been put under the purview of the Revenue Department, which is already corrupt with bribery and all sorts of malpractices.

Therefore, the Tamil Nadu Unorganised Workers' Federation decided to organize statewide demonstrations of the unorganized workers in order to pressurize the government to streamline the Labour welfare Board and implement pro unorganized workers policies. Hence, the Karur District Unorganised Workers' Federation organized a demonstration in front of the head post office in Karur on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2010.

About 100 workers participated in the demonstration. Mr. Velu, the secretary of Karur District All Labourers' Union (KADALU) presided over the demonstration. Mr. Rajasekar, the chief adviser of KADALU, Ms. Manjula, the treasurer of Society of Women in Action for Total Empowerment (SWATE), Ms. Packiyam and Ms. Janaki, executive committee members of Women's Front, Mr. Karikalan, the secretary of Dalit Rights Awareness Liberation Movement (DRALM), Mr. Senthilkuma, the coordinator of People's Development Movement (PDM) and Mr. Thangarasu of Tamil Nadu Rural Labourers' Movements' central Trade Union (TRLM-CTU) spoke, explaining the status of the unorganized workers in the state and the objective of the demonstration.

The AREDS cultural team also performed street theatre on the status of the unorganized workers in Tamil Nadu.



### [State level conference on the Human Rights](#)

Joining hands with the fraternal NGOs, people's movements and social activists AREDS observed the Human Rights Day by organizing a conference at Karur.

Since the participation of women was higher than that of the men, the conference took off with an awareness song on women. Mr. Sanmugam, a dalit activist, sang the song.

Mr. L. A. Samy, the director of AREDS, presided over the meeting and said that the meeting deserved to be called as state conference for there is representation of conservancy workers, dalit activists and civil society organizations from 22 districts. He said that the meaning of right was not begging for it but enjoying it without any hindrance. Unfortunately, education, employment and health are not made as fundamental rights in the Indian Constitution and so we are left to fight for asserting our right over them.

Activists and key functionaries from the **AREDS-initiated people's movements, Forum for Livelihood Rights – Tamil Nadu, Women's Front, Tamil Nadu Anti-Liquor Campaign, Tamil Nadu Conservancy Workers' Federation and Tamil Nadu Athi Andhra Maha Sabha (TAAMS)**, a programme unit of Janodayam, working for the rehabilitation of conservancy workers in Tamil Nadu participated in the conference from different districts.

Mr. Dharmar from **AHRF**, an NGO and Mr. Nagaraj from **Tamil Nadu Athi Andhra Maha Sabha (TAAMS)**, a programme unit of Janodayam, working for the rehabilitation of conservancy workers in Tamil Nadu, spoke on the rights of conservancy workers; Mr. Sakthivel from **SIDO**, an NGO, spoke on the dalit rights; Mr. Chandrasekar, representing the **Forum for Livelihood Rights (FLR-Tamil Nadu)** spoke on the rights of the bonded labourers; Ms. Christy, the general secretary of **Women's Front**, spoke on the rights of women and Ms. Sahayam from **People's Governance Cell (PGC)**, a programme unit of AREDS spoke on the educational right.

Mr. Dhanapal, Karur district secretary of **Periyar Dravida Kazhagam**, a reformist movement founded by Periyar a well-known Tamil reformist, recalled the reformist social service rendered by Periyar and Dr. Ambedkhar, the father of the Indian Constitution.

Mr. Isravel, the director of **Janodhayam**, a Chennai based NGO working for the rehabilitation of conservancy workers and Mr. Chelladurai, a **social researcher** from Bangalore, felicitated.

With participation of different organizations, movements and social activists, the conference was successful and effective in upholding human rights. Resolutions on the educational right of children, dalit rights, unorganized workers' rights, conservancy workers' rights, women's rights, environmental protection and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) were passed unanimously at the end of the conference.

**Last but not the least:**

We take this opportunity to thank all those partners who have made their annual contribution to the efforts of AREDS-SHARE. Their sincere and generous help is the one that moves our commitment and to reach out. Your timely contribution made out of your personal sacrifices can be sent to the following accounts of AREDS SHARE:

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**Yours in solidarity,**

L. A. Samy

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