

Report on the Right to Information workshop in Hyderabad held on November 22 and 23rd, 2001 and plan for the month of December.

The Workshop

A workshop on Right to Information was organized by CHRI in association with DAPPU (a network of dalit activists and organisations working for dalit rights, trade union, cooperatives, etc) and SAKSHI - Human Rights Watch. The objective of the workshop was to take the issue of Right to Information to grassroots activists working on various issues relating to dalit rights - such as land, atrocities, etc. The workshop was attended by 70 participants from across Andhra Pradesh belonging to the DAPPU network as also the Dalit Bahujan Front.

The workshop discussed the need and value of the Right to Information - the tone for the workshop was set My Maja Daruwala followed by addresses by Shri Shankaran (ex-IAS) and Shri B. Tarakam (Senior advocate and activist based in Hyderabad). The link between right to information and various dalit related issues was established through the course of the discussion that followed. A presentation was made by CHRI on the developments in India on the law on Right to Information and salient features of the law. The participants discussed the grassroots movement in Rajasthan. Mr.Chellakani of Loksatta conducted a section on Right to Information in Andhra Pradesh - Mr Chelakani informed the workshop that Loksatta had presented a draft Bill to the Government of Andhra Pradesh and that the government was drafting its own Bill and was considering enacting a law on the Right to Information. The participants felt that the issue should be taken to the grassroots and discussed in a wide forum and that the views of the community at large should be taken into consideration while enacting this law.

A village records officer from Chittoor district was invited to present details of land records available at the land records office. The participants found this session extremely useful as this exercise helped develop a monograph of records available at the local level and people were informed about how to access the same.

Conclusion - Outcome

Towards the end of the workshop - it was felt that the workshop firmly established the need for a law on right to information in the minds of the participants as they provided illustration upon illustration about the correlation between rights and lack of information and deliberate withholding of information. The Participants felt that they would with CHRI's catalysis and the support of DAPPU and SAKSHI be able to start a sustained information giving project which would create more and more demand for information. As a first step towards developing a campaign for right to information it was decided that each of the main groups present at the workshop would prepare a paper identifying their information needs and the barriers they face in accessing information in order to exercise their rights. This would help understand the issues involved in the law on right to information better and help relate the issue to grassroots struggle. CHRI will follow-up on these

Other Workshops

In continuation of its efforts to take the issue of Right to Information to a wider audience CHRI in association with the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists is organising a workshop for journalists from across the state on December 12th, 2001 in Hyderabad. The offer to organise this workshop with journalists came from interest generated among journalists who attended.

Work for the Month of December

CHRI is keen to build on the initial enthusiasm and interest this workshop has created and to maintain the momentum. CHRI's work for the month of December would be to conduct 2 workshops , firstly - as mentioned above a workshop with journalists in Hyderabad and secondly - workshop in Bhubaneshwar in association with CYSD for activists from across Orissa to develop a campaign in the state for a law on the Right to Information. In continuation of CHRI's advocacy on the right to information, CHRI made a presentation on "Right to Information and land acquisition and rehabilitation" at the National Conference on Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation held in Delhi on December 2nd and 3rd, 2001. CHRI continues its efforts towards building networks and reaching larger groups by linking right to information to the realization of other rights.

Financial Requirements

- a) The Journalists workshop in Hyderabad is expected to cost Rs 55,000
- b) The Workshop in Orissa - as it is being conducted in collaboration with CYSD is expected to result in expenditure of around 25,000.
- c) Publications - Rs 20,000