

SCHOOL FOR DEMOCRACY

ANNUAL REPORT and AUDITED ACCOUNTS 2011-2012

Introduction

There are a large number of literate people who *think* they know, but are very ill informed about how this democracy works or should. In this debate about the 'how' of it, there was a general consensus that we needed a defined space to address this. At this juncture the future of democracy seems to be threatened by specious arguments and processes. Political education has never seemed more important than it does now. A system of information sharing based on a secular constitutional framework seems critical to making make informed choices.

The School for democracy has got a physical presence now to tether the ideas and action that have sprung around it for some years. The slowness of the construction has been largely because of the flow of funds. While we still stick to raising money from non-institutional sources, we benefited from a handsome contribution from Kamla Bhasin of Rs.25 lakhs, which built the large Meeting/Convention hall. Mr. B. Sekhar also sent us money in the financial year 2011-12. This report gives information about the activities of the School For Democracy for the year 2011-2012.

3rd November, 2011. Jan Sunwai of the Electricity Department of Bhim.

A public hearing was organized focusing on the implementation of the Central Government's Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, (RGGVY) its flagship programme to provide free electricity connections to BPL households. The public hearing highlighted the urgent need for a focused legislation on grievances faced by citizens over a range of schemes and programmes, and their structural redress. The people's participation in the Sunwai led to uncovering of numerous cases of irregularities of the concerned department. Issues such as getting a bill without electricity, getting electricity without a bill, not receiving light bulbs they were entitled to, etc. came to the fore. This practice further helped the people to hold the government accountable for their grievances. In a larger context it was an effort towards good governance and deepening democracy in rural areas.

4th – 6th November. ICAN Meeting.

The ICAN meeting was held at the School For Democracy dedicated to brain storming and discussions on a range of topical issues related to questions of social movements and their organisation, and their interaction with state and society. Furthermore, meeting on Peoples Control Over Natural Resources, and on mining policy took place at the School For Democracy. The ICAN network, and other organisations and networks organized a meeting in a village close to the School for Democracy to discuss Peoples Control over the Commons as well as the growing impact of quarrying and mining in villages of the area. There was a discussion on the mining policy of the State of Rajasthan, and the proposed National Mining Bill and the principles to be followed/being followed in the use of common property resources in the mining areas. Amongst other objectives, the objective of this meeting was also to get involved with existing networks and strengthen ongoing efforts.

15th December – 16th December. Grievance Redressal camps.

Along with the NCPRI and many other organisations, the School For Democracy helped organise “Registration of Grievance camps” in order to understand some of the existing mechanisms, and bring particular attention to the support citizens would require in registering their grievances. This helped in addressing many of the challenges to redressing citizens’ grievances in a timely and effective manner. It was observed that it is important to provide a public platform where these issues can be understood in a more tangible and practical manner, and that this process took place in Delhi at a time when such legislation was being debated and discussed in Parliament.

21st January – 24th January. Literary festival youth participation.

At the Literary Festival held in Jaipur, the School For Democracy took five young people from the surrounding area of Bhim. A two-day orientation started prior to the festival at Step by Step High School on 18th January, as the workshop kicked off with a group of 72 girls and boys from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The entire group was divided into pairs who would bond, learn and share together for the duration of the festival. With one partner from an urban background and the other from rural Rajasthan, this was an opportunity to break down socio-cultural barriers. Through role-play and various other activities the youth got a platform to express their ideas on how they understand democracy and its importance in their lives.

28th January. Jan-sunwai on Janani Suraksha and Electricity department.

The people of Barkheda and Jhamdi gram panchayat came in record numbers for the ‘Jan Nigrani evam Shikayat Nivaraan Shivir’ organized by Soचना and Rozgaar Abhayan (a bigger group of organizations in Rajasthan of which School For democracy is a part of) and Prayatna Sanstha, Bharatpur. A combination of a public hearing and a grievance camp provided an opportunity for people to express their grievances, to be heard by government officials and to get redress. Mr. Gaurav Goyal, District Collector Bharatpur announced immediate action. He promised that the SDM, BDO, AEN and other officials present would resolve the highlighted issues within two weeks. The following day, he issued notices to several officials and ordered a continuation of the camp, on a Sunday, to file grievances and issue dated receipts. The impact of this hearing and camp held in just one panchayat was felt across the district.

25th February Pension Parishad

A Pension Parishad was organised in Pune on 25th February 2012 by trade unions of unorganized workers that included Maharashtra Rajya Hamal Mapadi Mahamandal, Kagad Kach Patra Kastakari Panchayat, Rickshaw Panchayat, Molkarin Sanghatna and others, was attended by over 25,000 workers. The School For Democracy participated in the meetings held and helped take the agenda and the campaign of Pension Parishad forward.

At the meeting held in Pune, it was agreed that there is an urgent need to look at the legislation on Social Security and raise a demand for a universal old age pension. To this effect, a decision was taken to have a large mobilisation of elderly people in Delhi during the coming parliamentary session and to develop this demand into a nationwide campaign.

Trainings for interns:

Many interns came for a joint internship at the School For Democracy and the MKSS. Interns came to understand how people driven policy making led to the enactment of the Right to Information Act. The school for democracy organized visits to MGNREGS worksites to help understand how the employment guarantee scheme has been helping in alleviation of poverty. Furthermore visits to Panchayat offices were also organized to make the interns understand the functioning of rural administrative matters. Interns also participated in various Dharnas, public-hearings and workshops that the School For Democracy participated and organized with other organisations and campaigns.

The 80(G) certificate and Audited accounts of the School For Democracy are attached with this report.