

**Report  
on  
Second Peoples Convention  
on  
Public Distribution System, Agriculture and  
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment  
Guarantee Act 2005.**



**Organised by  
Peoples Right Forum, Assam  
in collaboration with  
Gramya Vikash Manch, Nalbari.**

**Supported by  
International Food Security Network  
and  
Indo Global Social Service Society.**

**Funded by European Commission**

**Venue: Barbari High School, Barbari (Nalbari)  
Dated: 29/03/2011**

<b>Contents:</b>	<b>Page Numbers</b>
Introduction:	
Objectives of the Convention:	
Song by Sishu Suraksha Manch, Nalbari:	
Speech on Agriculture Productions,	
Procurement, Distribution (PDS) and overall policy issues:	
Song by Kamini Mohan Barpetra form GVM:	
Public Declaration of the Status of Proposed National Food security Bill:	
Song by Hemali Talukar:	
Speech on MGNREGA Implementation Status:	
Interaction Session:	
Case Study:	
Demands of the Peoples Rights Forum:	
Press Meet:	
Conclusion:	

**Introduction:**

The second state peoples' convention on the right to food campaign was held in Barbari at Nalbari District on 29/03/2011. It is organized after two years to discuss and find out the activities that have been accomplished successfully within these two years campaign and the changes that have been achieved with the due course of time. It is also a platform for the rights based workers to share their better and bitter experiences of their move in the campaign and put forward if there is any changes or amendments that has to be made in the whole campaign. More than 250 women and 500 men from 17 districts of Assam met together in a common platform through People's Right Forum, Assam on this day. About 16 non-governmental organizations and their constituencies met together shared their experiences and discuss the issues related with two major schemes of Govt of India viz. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA 2005) and Public Distribution System (PDS) in Assam and Agriculture.

Chakradar Talukdar, a worker of GVM, Nalbari welcomed all the guests and participants of the convention. Janki Pegu the state coordinator of the Peoples' Right Forum introduced all the guests and the chairperson in the chair. All the guests were felicitated by a "Phulam Gamosa and a Japi" the Assamese traditional way of addressing guests. Then the sessions were hosted by Prithi Bhusan Deka the president of GVM, Nalbari who at the beginning itself urged the participants to cooperate and also thanked for attending the convention coming from various nuke and corner of the state.

The guests present in the convention are:

- Raju Narzary conenor Peoples Rights Forum Assam.
- Manaranjan Neog from Krikhi Vikash Kendra, Nalbari.
- Dr. Sunil Kaul, State Advisor to Supreme Court Commissioner on Right To Food.
- Headmistress of the Borbori High school.

Manaranjan Neog was the only guests who was also resource person form the state government.

**Objectives of the Convention:**

Raju Narzary, the convener of the Peoples Rights Forum, addressed the objectives of the convention. He started his speech with a brief history and concept of the formation of Peoples Rights Forum that this forum is a platform of more than 17 organisations that help the poor and marginalized communities in articulating and accessing their rights and entitlements. He also said that while India's growth story has been tom-tommed as a success story everywhere, the rise in food prices and the diminishing returns on agriculture have wreaked havoc on the rural poor. The poor state of the Public Distribution System, the corruption in reaching out nutrition related schemes to the children and pregnant mothers, and the abysmal implementation of the subsistence allowances for windows and old peoples despite the Supreme Court's orders for the same has worsened the plight of the poor and marginalized sections of society. An unbridled drive towards commercialization and privatisation of all public institutions has been

justified in the guise of earning more revenues by the government to increase the spending on social sector schemes like MGNREGA and ICDS, etc. On the one hand, the allocations for the social sector to mitigate the effects of price-rise have been far from sufficient.

He also said that right to food was made fundamental right by the Supreme Court in 2001. The Peoples Rights Forum has campaigned for advocating for drafting of the National Food Security Bill. Assam has a very fertile land with available water resource and hard working people. If little effort of encouragement is shown to its people by the government there will be an enormous cultivation here and it will be a self-sufficient food secured state. The objectives of the convention are:

1. To discuss the implementation status of Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 in Assam.
2. To discuss and find out the activities those have been accomplished successfully within these two years of campaign.
3. To figure out the changes those have been achieved with the due course of time.
4. To share their good and bitter experiences of their move in the campaign and put forward if there is any changes or amendments that has to be made in the whole campaign.
5. To declare the status of proposed National Food Security Bill.
6. To highlight various loopholes and issues related with implementation technicalities of NREGA 2005 and PDS in Assam.
7. To make the public aware of agricultural productions, procurement, distribution and overall policy issues.
8. To make attention of related departments on various issues of NREGA 2005 and PDS in Assam, and
9. To ensure effective implementation of PDS, ICDS, MDMS, MGNREGA and various other schemes which would promote a better living of the poor.
10. To discuss not only rights but also responsibilities of the common people.

### **Song by Sishu Suraksha Manch, Nalbari:**

Abu Bakhar a visually impaired student from Sishu Suraksha Manch, Nalbari, presented a beautiful song.

## **Speech on Agriculture Productions, Procurement, Distribution (PDS) and overall policy issues:**

Manuranjan Neog from Krikhi Vikash Kendra, Nalbari delivered the speech. In his speech he took the opportunity to give a brief introduction of KVK and their recent ongoing programmes. KVK is a training institute of government of India for farming. It has got centre in every district of the state. It provides practical oriented courses for farmers or unemployed youths by which they can earn for their livelihood and become self-sufficient. KVK is looking forward to establish knowledge and resource centres from where they bombard different kinds information regarding seasonal cultivation and soils testing etc. Efforts are being made to introduce a sms service to deliver agriculture related information. There are also efforts to promote the KVK into a university starting with short-term agriculture related diploma courses at the initial stage. He also admitted that 70% of the Assam's economy is generated from cultivation and it is one of the best remedy for reducing poor from the region. But at the present stage due to the increase of population the cultivation land and the water resource is decreasing and the cultivators are in extreme agony for being technically unskilled, climate change, unable to adopt new methods of cultivation. So there should be adoption of advance technology like multiple cropping, SRI and Water Resource Management etc. To encourage the cultivators, they should be provided Minimum Support Price forming farmers' interest groups, Insurance Schemes for the cultivation, Assured Marketing System and Minimise Price Fluctuation by storing the commodities for future. He also urged the cultivators to practice organic farming for sustainable agriculture, which must be technical, economical, eco friendly and local way of preservation. Besides the agricultural cultivation the other areas like fish cultivation, Plant Variety Protection (medicinal) and fruit cultivation must be taken care of, as they are also equal way of uplifting the rural economy. KVK organises different awareness programmes on conservation of agricultural land, water literacy, preservation of local products that are unique (Gene Bank) and introducing Climate Managers on every regions. KVK is also looking forward to strengthen NGO's, joint liability groups, joint forest management committee and Women Self Help Group's to identify land quality , HVY seed production.

## **Song by Kamini Mohan Borpatra form GVM:**

A song was presented by Kamini Mohan Borpatra followed by the hearty welcoming of the Headmistress of the Borbari High School participated in the discussions.

## **Public Declaration of the Status of Proposed National Food security Bill:**

Dr. Sunil Kaul, State Advisor to Supreme Court Commissioner on Right to Food, read out the status of the Proposed National Food Security Bill to the public.

- To make PDS transparent so that filing of RTI is not at all required. It will be an open office and information will be made public within 15 days time.
- Fine should be imposed to those officials who do not perform their duty in a responsible way. The fine should be 3 times to the price of food commodities.
- There should be an appointment of officials who will monitor the works of every official and have the power to fine if any anomalies found.
- The incumbency of the complaint receiving employee will be for 5 years and he/she should be a postgraduate in qualification.
- 90% of the people from the rural and 50% from the urban area must be the beneficiary of the PDS and not in the basis of APL or BPL.
- The government must provide the proposed amount commodities.
- The government should encourage traditional cultivation locally so that it doesn't have to depend on other states for supply of commodities.
- Widows, destitute, should be recognised as BPL immediately.
- People affected by natural calamities must be enrolled in the BPL list for one year without any documents, quotas or reservation.
- Any child of below 14 years of age can go to any anganwadi centre and have his meal.
- Women must be provided the authority to open ration shops.
- There must be provision for sms alerts for information of commodities and every transaction must be socially audited.

He also adds in his speech that India is rated the fourth richest country in the world but its society is still poor and occupies 13<sup>th</sup> position in terms of malnourished children. The government hesitates or lacks to be transparent of the system and not accountable to the basic needs of the common people. He also said that if India can spend 30% of its G.D.P for the sake of defence why not for fulfilling the basic needs of the people? Sunil also cited the

example of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura where the PDS, MGNREGA, ICDS and MDMS are implemented properly.

### **Song by Hemali Talukdar:**

Hemali Talukdar a local folk singer sang a folk song and entertained the people in the midst of the discussions.

### **Speech on MGNREGA Implementation Status:**

Chandan Talukdar from GVM delivered a speech on the MGNREGA implementation status. Talukdar shares about his three years of working experience with the community. They managed to collaborate with three districts Baksa, Nalbari and Kamrup (Rural) and work for different social issues. Regarding MGNREGA they found that many people do not know that it is an act, which provides 100 days job guarantee. He shares the information that for MGNREGA Rs. 1 crore was sanctioned to the VCDC of Baksa district. But no one knows where the money was siphoned and it was not made transparent to the people. The people were provided jobs only for 20 to 30 days and even the wages are not paid for the complete number of days worked. If the people go to ask for the money they are behaved rudely or sometimes physically abused. In Nalbari district people are provided only 30 to 40 days job. In Mukalmua of Nalbari district people did not receive the wages of the work they have done two years back. And in Kamrup district there are cases of providing jobs only for 10 days to the people.

### **Interaction Session:**

In the interaction session the participants coming from different districts of Assam have shared their experience and also asked questions to the chairpersons for clarification.

- A woman from Nalbari asked to Dr. Sunil Kaul that the BPL cards which is meant for the poor and needy are distributed more to the rich who are enjoying the benefit of it whereas maximum of the poor have no BPL cards in her place. Why?

Dr. Kaul replied that if the poor people did not receive the BPL cards they definitely should ask this question to the Panchayat president. He also urged the people that the people must be very aware of the BPL survey conducted by the Food and Civil Service Department. If any wrong selection of people is

found in the BPL list they must send a proposal to the commissioner of the Food and Civil Service Department for reviewing the list and strike out ineligible people from the list. He also said that Gram Seva does not encourage the common people's participation in the decision making of the villages. If the people do not raise voice against it than every individual will be deprived of Rs. 13000 that is sanctioned only on their behalf.

- Kamal Bharali from Gohpur (Sonitpur District) shared that politics cannot be ignored for the proper implementation of the schemes. So he requested to elect good representatives in the political system, who will always be committed for holistic approach and implement all the schemes properly.

### **Case Study:**

- MGNREGA was started in Chirang district on 2009. But after three years of implementation, people are hardly aware about it. People only understand that VCDC(village council Development Committee) members selects few families for work (as per their wish) and they provide employment against work sanctions in respective areas.

This is a story of few women of Deosri VCDC under Sidli block of Chirang. Deosri is situated under the foothills of Bhutan. Most of the peoples' livelihood is based on agriculture and as day labourer. Due to awareness program of Local NGOs and local student union body, people have come to know about the procedure of MGNREGA and it usefulness. One day four women ask to VCDC chairman to give employment in NREGA works. The chairman simply said, "No work has started now, and I have not got any information from block office" So if work starts I will inform you". Next day the women decided to apply work in written to the chairman. They also asked him for a receipt copy of their application. A copy of the application was also given to the BDO. Within four days, the chairman provided employment to those women. They also mobilized other women of their village. At least 35 women worked in two-working sites and were in completed 40 days. The struggles of these women have not come to an end yet. But they experienced the repercussion of written application in NREGA.

- Mr. Rajib Morang a resident of Dangdhora Gaon under Madhupur Gaon Panchayat of Titabor constituency had filed an RTI in Titabor Sub division office for the information of BPL, AAY and APL list on 18/3/2010. He accessed all the information from 12/5/10.

Then again on 21/6/2010 he filed an RTI to the Titabor Subdivision Office for the details of Sale Register of Rice, Sugar, Flour and Kerosene oil. In response to the RTI the Secretary of the Madhupur Gaon promised him to give the information of the Sale register of the commodities supplied from 2009 to 21/6/2010. But after being promised also he was not given the complete list of the sale register. Finding the anomalies Rajib Morang appealed the State



Information Commissioner to take action against it on 17/8/2010. In response to Rajib's plea the Assistant public Information officer on 31/8/2010 called a hearing at Titabor Subdivisional office. On the hearing day the information officer ordered to provide him the complete information by 3/9/2010. But the information was still not provided to him. Then on 7/10/2010 he made a second appeal to the State Information Commissioner for the same issue. The Commissioner called for a second hearing on 11/11/2010. On the second the Secretary of the Madhupur Samabay Samiti once more promised to give him the complete information along with that of Kerosene oil. But again he failed to keep up his promise. On 12/1/2011 Rajib Morang made a third appeal to the State Information Commissioner but still no action has been taken yet. This clearly shows the breaking of law by the Government authorities and Panchayat members.

He also filed an RTI on 26/10/2010 in the Titabor Sub divisional Office to access information regarding the commodities the agents receive and being distributed to the beneficiaries. He found lot of anomalies in the quantity of commodities that has been received by agents from the Samabay and distribution made to the beneficiaries. In his area there are about 21 poor families and the commodities which is sanctioned for their sake is kept under his custody and never distributed. For this reason those families who are daily wage labourers are compelled to buy the Kerosene oil for Rs. 20 to 25. Even in this issue Morang was not given any information for which he appealed to the State Information Commissioner in vain. He shared that the APL cards which was being collected 20 years before were not returned back to the stake holders that has become an advantage for the agents misuse it. 27 kilos of PDS rice may be distributed but there are problems with the weighing machines which should be taken into concern.

### **Demands of the Peoples Rights Forum:**

- 1) Universalisation of the Public Distribution System so that the corruption in selection of Below Poverty Line families does not come in the way of the Right to Food and Right to Life of the poor people of India.
- 2) It demands that the MGNREGA must become effective and 100 days employment must be ensured to all the rural households at the earliest as mandated by the act.
- 3) The Peoples Rights Forum also demands that Antyodaya beneficiaries in line with Supreme Court's orders must be selected at the earliest and the benefits extended to such poorest of the poor households at the earliest.
- 4) It also demands greater transparency in the PDS by demanding that the government periodically publish rates of all essential commodities in all vernacular dailies and take strict action against those dealers who infringe any of the rules of their engagement with the PDS.

- 5) The Forum also demands a Minimum Support for Price for the agricultural produce of farmers to promote local production, procurement and distribution of food grains in Assam.
- 6) It also demands good governance so that the rights based activists are secured.

### **Press Meet:**

After the discussions in the convention there was a press meet. Media persons from both print and television media like DD News Assam Tribune, Frontier TV, Pratidin, News Time and Aji were present in the meet. Raju Narzary briefly mentioned the objectives and demands of the Peoples' Rights Forum. The Peoples Rights Forum opposed the Chief Secretary's opinions that rights based activists' are preparing grounds for Maoists and involved in anti social elements. He also requested the media persons to highlight the food security issues of the poor. He on behalf of the Peoples' Rights Forum promised to abide the rules and regulations of the act and campaign for sustainable agricultural development across the country.

### **Conclusion:**

This convention was very important to discuss and find out the activities that have been accomplished successfully within these two years of campaign and the changes that have been achieved with the due course of time. It is also a platform for the rights based workers to share their better and bitter experiences of their move in the campaign and put forward if there is any changes or amendments that has to be made in the whole campaign. Besides it has really sensitized the common people regarding all the right to food issues. It has made the people aware of the loopholes of the implementation of the PDS, ICDS, MDMS and MGNREGA. The participants also got a space to speak out about their difficulties they faced due to the food security issues. As the participants have come from different districts of Assam it has helped them to build a network among themselves and share their problems. As most of their problems were very common there was an exchange of ideas that seemed to be an encouragement for them. The mentioning of the status of the proposed National Food Security Bill was a very important session. The process was very participatory as there were public feedbacks on the proposed bill.