

Corruption and Its Effects on the Rural Poor
National Conference 26th and 27th November 2011
Organised by INTAF – International Task Force for the Rural Poor
Hosted by the Gramodaya Post-Graduate College, Amarpurkashi

This highly successful conference was motivated by the conviction that the rural poor are the worst sufferers of corruption. Their powerlessness makes them very vulnerable to bribery, coercion, repression and exploitation.

Corruption is nothing new. However, it has risen sharply in recent years. Although all political parties have declared that they will work to eradicate corruption, nothing effective has been done and their claims have proved hollow.

First Swami Ramdev and then Anna Hazare and his team gave a glimmer of hope for the poor. However, this is a difficult struggle and they need every support if they are to have any hope of succeeding.

Over 200 delegates attended the conference, including representatives from voluntary development organisations, networks engaged in activities to promote the welfare and development of the rural poor, researchers, students of rural studies and those living and working in villages.

The main speakers who initiated and guided discussion included Dr Vineet Narain a prominent freelance columnist and journalist from New Delhi, Moulana Mufti Samoon Quasmi from Bijnor, U.P., member of the Anna Core Committee, Mukat Singh from Amarpurkashi, U.P., rural development activist and International Co-convenor, INTAF India, Dr Jai Pal Singh Vyast from Moradabad, U.P., educationist and research guide for 'Education for All', Dr Harbans Dikshit, Principal, Maharaja H P.G. College Moradabad and law expert and Dr Vishesh Gupta from Moradabad, freelance columnist and well-known sociologist.

Discussion over the course of the two-day conference was lively and well-informed, resulting in the following conclusions which were sent to the Honourable Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Honourable Chairman of the Rajya Sabha for their consideration, with a request that they be included in the anti-

corruption bills due to be placed before parliament.

- The rural poor are the most affected and oppressed by corruption
- They have no organized voice to represent their interest in the government, even though they are the majority in all elected governments
- They have no common language of their own
- They are very angry with the anti-corruption laws and the implementing procedures and mechanisms of the government. This anger is increasing every day. It is difficult to foresee when it will erupt.
- They welcome promises from the political parties in power and in opposition to bring about changes in the system and pass an effective and strong Lok Pal Act to deal with rampant corruption. They expect them to honour these promises.
- They expect the central government to honour its declared promise to pass a strong and effective Lok Pal Act giving full and direct relief to the poor in the current winter session of parliament.
- For this purpose, the central government should formulate a simple, strong and effective Lokayukt bill similar to the Lok Pal Bill passed in parliament.
- Every day, the rural poor have to face corrupt employees, officers and elected public representatives in their states. They therefore urge that an independent, simple and strong Lokayukt bill be passed which protects the interests of the illiterate and semi-literate people living in villages from the cruelty and injustice of corruption.
- They are unhappy to note that, despite having been presented seven times in parliament, the Lok Pal Bill has not yet been passed. They therefore urge the central government to pass a Lok Pal/ Lokayukt Bill which directly protects the interests of the rural poor in the current winter session of parliament.