

***Jan-Sunwai* : Amplifying the voice of the communities**



July 25, 2007 shall be always remembered by the communities from Dhirai Majuli Village, Sonitpur District, Assam as they had their first *JanSunwai*-Public Hearing Meet in which they not only put forth their grievances but also demanded corrective measures with prompt action from the government. SWARAJ – The People’s Organisation (PO) and North East India DBSS accompanied by the CNI’s Synodical board of Social Services (SBSS) assisted them in this process, sensitizing the people about their rights and entitlements. This mass-event, widely covered by the media has not only shook the district officials but has also attracted the attention of

the State forcing them to have a look into the matter. This empowerment has boosted the morale of the people giving them a new confidence and strength to fight against the corrupt social & political structure for the equalization of power and basic rights.

Background : During the data-base development process, DBSS had observed that GramSabha was not functioning and they started to generate awareness with series of trainings on Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) since March 2006. DBSS in this process identified leaders from the communities, capacitated them with the concept and tools and encouraged them to make use of Right to Information (RTI) in their areas to check the status of GramSabha and the development works carried out by the Panchayats in last five years.

Process : Thirteen petitions were filed in December 2006 and the replies for these were received only in May 2007 which were unsatisfactory and turned out to be fabricated after the spot verification done by the PO. This boosted people to conduct a public-hearing in which they could not only test the facts but demand appropriate actions. Community was sensitized and prepared for the *JanSunwai* to be held in July 2007 by conducting meetings, exhibitions, enacting street-plays and distributing leaflets and posters. This helped the communities to enable themselves to raise a question and counter the cross-questions. Invitations were sent to DC, BDOs, Panchayat presidents and secretaries.



Action : On the day of *JanSunwai* i.e. on July 25, 2007 more than 300 community members from all the villages in Pirakata Panchayat gathered in a school compound, excited and hopeful that finally they would be able to put their words forth and action would be taken... but the government officials and some of the Panchayat members didn’t turn up at all! Their phones were switched off and it came to light that they even dissuaded other villagers to participate in the meeting.

Absence of these officials didn’t dampen the spirits of the people. The proceedings were carried out despite of rains. A signature campaign was planned and memorandum was planned.

Media Advocacy : A day before public-hearing, press-conference was held. The news-personnel representing different media saw the evidence, and were supportive extending their co-operation to the PO in its all further activities. Media gave a wide coverage to this event taking the plight of these people to all the corners, attracting attention from the higher level too. The State Government has asked the concerned officials to submit their explanation.

Outcome with an Impact! : *JanSunwai* – first of its kind in this region gave an opportunity to the community to enable and empower themselves to share their grievances and demand accountability from the government and the Panchayats. In spite these officials didn't turn up, the proceedings were carried out. Signature Campaign was launched and clarification was demanded.

This mass-awakening has resulted favourably... Block administration is now under pressure, contacting the PO to patch-up and hush-up the matter admitting their mistakes.

This event has motivated and encouraged others too. They have been asking about the process to be carried out in their areas.

The people from Pirakata Panchayat are hopeful that the matter will be looked into and they will get the justice!



Based on the reports sent by NEI DBSS and CNI RCSA Barrackpore
