

Accompanying Peace, Power and People : The Accompaniers Meet

The Accompaniers Meet of CNI-SBSS saw a host of events, confluence of thoughts and outburst of emotions. The participants' engagement with the communities' struggle united the most unlikely participants and rejuvenated their passion of servitude. From the 25th of Feb to the 5th of March this year the staff of SBSS from Delhi, Pune, Agra, Kolkata, Amritsar & Marathwada united as a larger group to participate in the discussion on the Power Dynamics within the organization, attend LCP workshop, discuss the internalization of 'Speaking Out' and engage with the *Adivasis* in their ongoing struggle for their land & identity.

A confluence of thoughts, outburst of emotions, bidding farewell, sharing experiences, speaking out & then backing out, '*dividers*' and '*connecters*', power dynamics, engaging in the struggle with the *Adivasis*, enjoying their warm hospitality, the dinner invitation at the residence of The Rt. Rev. B. B. Baskey (Bishop Chotanagpur) and the grand finale in the Betla tiger reserve. The Accompanier meet in Ranchi was indeed a memorable experience for every participant and it has left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of all.



The meet began with the farewell of Ashananda Tandy former team-leader RCSA Barrackpore. An amiable staff, loved and cherished by everyone. He was with the organization for 8 years. His farewell was an emotional event, where everyone thanked Asha for his contribution and wished him well in life.

The Accompaniers Meet was a golden opportunity to meet together as a larger group and know where we are as an individual and as a group and where we want to go from there.

Students from XISS Ranchi were invited for fellowship dinner with the SBSS staff to familiarize them with our organization and learn more about the work we are involved with. It was an interactive session that was enjoyed by everyone present there.



Elizabeth and Vikram, after completion of their Training of Trainers (ToT-4), utilized their newly acquired skills and learning to share and reintroduce the '**Local Capacities for Peace**' (LCP) framework with the colleagues. The topics shared were Introduction & History of LCP, Case-Study Analysis, Identifying Connectors and Dividers, Impact of Aid/ Assistance in the conflict areas, Options & Programme Alternatives with the LCP Framework. The main objective of these sessions was to get familiar with LCP tool and its components to use it for the analysis in our own local context.



It not only educated and informed the participants but also brought out the child in everyone. Everyone participated with much enthusiasm and involvement. The workshop was a good beginning and starter to the Accompaniers Meet.

A session on '**Power Dynamics**' a collective understanding of what power is at SBSS, RCSA and DBSS level was facilitated by Bibhu. There was a one on one interaction where the partners shared with each other one instance in which they have either

exercised or experienced power. The participants also answered a questionnaire stating their feelings and behavior related to 'Speaking Out'. They answered questions like 'Why, when, what, to whom and for whom do you *Speak Out*?' The questionnaire was filled anonymously and submitted. The answers brought out the concerns and grievances of the participants.



In continuation to the discussion on Power Dynamics, the participants were forthcoming the following day and openly shared their experiences where they felt powerless. The participation was hesitant in the beginning but as the discussion progressed more and more people came forth and there was an emotional outburst. The entire discussion was recorded in details and later discussed in the presence of Dr. Shailendra Awale, the Chief Coordinator.

A preparatory exercise was conducted prior to the engagement with the communities under the guidance of Dr. Shailendra Awale. This helped the accompaniers in understanding the struggle of the people they were meeting during the community engagement and facilitated their interaction with the communities.



We were also benefited by the presence of Mr Daniel Das and Rev PK Aksal, DBSS Coordinators of SEDP Amritsar and Marathwada respectively who shared

their understanding of '*Speaking Out*' document and their experiences and concerns in their DBSS.

Their sharing was a reality check for the participants and gave us a better perspective about the issues faced by them in their areas and were also encouraged by their success stories.

The Accompaniers were divided into 4 groups to engage with 4 different communities at Soyko, Ramtolya, Pimpi and Bano. CNISBSS staff, as Accompaniers visited these communities, engaged in their struggle, to learn more about their plight and discuss ways and means in which they could effectively participate with them.

The sun and the heat could not deter hundreds of *Adivasis* from various *Gram Panchayats* to gather together simultaneously in the 4 villages in support of their struggle for their land and identity coming forward with CNISBSS staff to *Speak Out*.



It was an overwhelming experience for the Accompaniers to experience the warm hospitality and be a part of their struggle. The engagement with the communities and to witness their community mobilisation left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of all. Together with DBSS and community, we worked on a plan to translate such community mobilisation to be a people's movement working towards protecting rights of tribal and their access and control over *jal, jangal* and *jameen*. We also committed our involvement and support to take this struggle forward and protect life, livelihood and identity of tribal.

The next day the 4 teams made their presentation on the previous day's community engagement in the presence of DBSS CNP Staff, Community Members and other team members. The learning and insights received helped us to refine our strategy of support to the struggle.

In the concluding session the Dr. Shailendra Awale thanked and felicitated the Community Members,

DBSS Staff and SBSS staff for their contribution.

The same evening all the members attending the Accompaniers' Meet were invited for dinner by the Rt. Rev. B. B. Baskey at his residence. It was a wonderful opportunity of fellowship with his family and the families of our RCSA Ranchi team.

The last two days were used as an opportunity to unwind and bond with the team members during the recreational break at Betla Tiger Reserve. It was an interesting experience going on a wild safari. Our host Mr. Jitendra who has been working with the community for many years shared his experience working in the area. He discussed the issues and how we can fight against them as a team.