

# GROOTS

GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS OPERATING TOGETHER IN SISTERHOOD (SOUTH ASIA)

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*Editorial*

## LAND ACQUISITION BILL - IS IT A BOON OR BANE?

The Land Acquisition Bill currently proposed by the new government is not only a burning issue for discussion both in the public arena and also among the academician. Further it is rapidly spreading to rural areas seeking the attention of rural masses for whom it is very crucial.

The subject of ownership of land as all of us are aware is an important economic/ human right issue in India. In fact it is not only an integral part of rural life but also a livelihood process for nearly 67% of the rural population that includes farmers and agricultural workers.

To revert back to history, the Land Acquisition Act was imposed in India during the British rule in the year 1894. The Bill was then considered in those days as autocratic as no mention was made both in theory and practice regarding the purpose of the acquisition of



land i.e., whether it is for public or other purposes. Such an Act was made use of even after independence where the acquired land was utilised for various kinds of development projects like roads, power projects, highways, etc. The government also acquired land for private sector projects like for businesses and housing provisions.

It's a known fact that the people who had lost their land earlier seldom received any benefits whenever there had been a project initiated on such lands. They neither received fair compensation nor have found employment opportunity in the name of development of the project after losing their valuable possession. The reality is that the project brought in more outsiders and the developers had no intention to give the local people a chance to work or train them towards such necessities and found them ignorant of working necessities/



capabilities. Of course, the land was acquired by either big industrialists or the government for initiating industrial outfits. In fact, initiating a project on such land they hardly ever had the commitment i.e., Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to facilitate the small/marginal owners with least concern for large scale pollution that affected the surroundings destroying the environment.

What could be observed in many families is that a small piece of land is an asset either to acquire loan or educate their children or to perform marriages. Therefore this small piece of land for rural families is so valuable in many ways despite low irrigation facilities, inadequate/supportive infrastructures, etc. It's also true that the agriculture sector is in distress as it has been neglected in many ways and many farmers are forced to commit suicide due to many reasons. Yet the reality is that most of the small and marginal owners depend on this small piece of land.

The fact remains that 67% of the rural population live in India and over 48% of the workforce are still employed in agriculture. Therefore the proposed land acquisition bill will certainly affect the village economy and culture as it stands to profit/benefit the rich and well-to-do only.

Therefore the government has to adopt certain remedial measures in future while dealing with the land owners i.e., the government has to facilitate towards the resettlement and fair compensation. Above all their consent to give up their valuable possession is very important. Also if and when the acquisition takes place the small/marginal farmers must have their time to challenge their acquisition legally and

to find alternate occupations/ arrangements towards their new livelihood process. These are some of the basic aspects of democracy that people do expect i.e., to have a say in the decision that directly affect their livelihoods and lives.

Also the farmers must be aware for what purpose the land acquired is going to be used i.e., whether for public purpose like roads, etc., or for the benefit of corporate bodies. Otherwise the consequences of environmental degradation in the current scenario will be more as the forest land is shrinking and in more than 20 states over 1000 of hectares of land has been transformed into the real estate affecting the food security and sustainability of the country.

In the interest of the food security, the small/marginal farmers who exist on such tiny holdings of land surviving on non-remunerative farming activities should be facilitated towards storage of food items for perishable food products like onion, potatoes, etc, digging of bore-wells, irrigation facilities during failure of monsoons. These are respective responses the rural populations expect from the democratically elected government as the proposed land acquisition bill benefits the corporate bodies depriving the farmers their sustainable livelihood. Besides no one is aware that agriculture and its produces are natural resources that's being exploited with least concern for future generation.

Therefore if the government fails to consider the measures mentioned above while enforcing the new land acquisition bill it would be a bane for the government that's elected with full majority. 

## Visitors to Working Women's Forum (India)/ Indian Cooperative Network for Women



Mr. Balu Iyer listening to the experience of field worker

Mr. Balasubramian Iyer (Balu Iyer), Regional Director, International Cooperative Alliance, Asia-Pacific visited Working Women's Forum (India) on 30 January 2015, on his way back to New Delhi from Gandhigram to have firsthand knowledge on the working aspects of the WWF/ICNW. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam President, WWF suggested that ICA can have facilitative programmes for cooperatives such as ICNW that serves poor women entrepreneurs. Since WWF/ICNW model has been replicated in many districts and states this would pave way for developing countries to have a similar outfit in their respective regions. President, WWF also felt that the Indian banks could adopt the work techniques and procedures of foreign banks like Citibank and Rabo bank who are interested in serving the institutions like WWF/ICNW that's work for the poor.

To acquaint with the various operational aspects of ICNW, Mr. Balu Iyer visited the cooperative bank to have a deeper insight into the loan size, shares, election process etc. While interacting with the staff/field workers he was moved on hearing their personal stories, the difficulties they had to go through

and the measures taken to resolve them by coming together supporting each other and determining their own future that was inspiring to hear and see. He observed that the cooperative spirit is well alive and in good hands and felt that each and every women is a leader and a model, setting an example for others. ■

Prof. Karen Pechilis NEH Distinguished Professor of Humanities, Professor of Comparative Religion, Drew University, US visited WWF on 22 January 2015. She had a discussion with the President WWF regarding the possibility of working in partnership i.e., for internship/research work of her students in WWF. On 10 February 2015, she made a field visit to Kosapet, Pattalam market, Marina beach etc., to interact with the micro-entrepreneurs directly. She also observed their economic empowerment and progress. Later on 23 February 2015, Prof. Karen Pechilis along with her colleague Prof. Caitlin Killian visited Adiramapattinam rural branch in Thanjavur district. They were given warm welcome and later had discussions with the staff/members on local issues. Visiting the



Prof. Karen Pechilis interacting with micro-entrepreneur



Prof. Karen Pechilis with fisher women at Adiramapattinam

areas Keezhaithottam, fish market and other places to interact with both fisherwomen and micro-entrepreneurs, they learned about their working/living conditions. The professors were pleased with the visit and expressed that they had an “an amazing day combining warmth, heartfelt and real discussion ...”

Three students from Asian School of Journalism visited WWF on 24 February 2015, as part of their project Analysis on Women's Empowerment. Meeting the president WWF various queries on the need for mobilization for poor women, importance of financial literacy and the necessity to bring in change among women were raised. Besides to the query, on hostels for single woman. President WWF said the concept of hostels for single woman works in the west but in India one has to wait and watch due to cultural difference in India though it is a necessity in India too.

Two staff from Vijaya Hospital, Chennai visited WWF on 18 March 2015 with the motive of nominating a member of WWF in their sexual harassment committee. They further discussed on this subject with the organizers/supervisors.



President WWF & CGM NABARD signing partnership

On 25 March 2015 Mr. K.Venkateswara Rao, CGM, NABARD accompanied by his team visited Working women's Forum (India), Chennai to have discussion on future partnership. In the opening remarks Ms. Arunachalam expressed that financial assistance is important but equally important in any new partnership is to become familiar with the new partners and their task/work among the clientele. For this, visiting the areas where the clientele live/work is also important as they would be the future participants of NABARD loan. At the meeting, the board members briefed the team on the programmes/activities of WWF/ICNW, details of training to members, investment pattern,



Mr. K. Venkateswara Rao, CGM, NABARD disbursing loan

etc. At this point Mr.Venkateswara Rao, CGM, NABARD also described their own programmes and said NABARD has grown with its partners and will certainly propose to learn more and diversify the programmes knowing the expectations from both the sides. 

Mr.Gaurav Bhandari, Business Development Manager - Global Partnerships at Green Planet (dealing with solar lamps) Mumbai visited WWF on 7 April 2015 with a desire to have partnership with WWF. He demonstrated various types of solar lamps and their uses in the urban/rural areas and that the lamps could be fitted even on the roof in rural households. Further he was keen on visiting the branches to promote the same. 

Ms.K.Thejovathy, the new Regional Director, National Credit Development Corporation (NCDC), Chennai along with Mr.Rajbir Singh, Assistant Director visited WWF on 8 April 2015 regarding the proposal to fund the organization. After the discussion she said WWF is an outstanding organization with an exemplary record. 

Mr.Gasper D'Souza, a documentary film maker based in Goa was on a 3 day visit to Working Women's Forum (India) i.e., from 11-13 June 2015. This was in connection with the new documentary to find out about the continuation of the process of UN Women's Conference held in Beijing in the year 1995 as part of Global Women's Movement. The documentary is being produced by US based film maker Ms. Sara Wolitzky, MCGee Media and Mr.Gasper was given the task to cover the Indian participants who attended the Beijing conference. He visited WWF members where

they live/work, covered organizers meeting and interviewed Dr.Jaya Arunachalam and Dr.Nandini Azad. 



Mr. Hemant Sharma & Ms. Deepali glancing documents

Mr.Hemant Sharma, Chief Secretary/ CEO, accompanied by his colleague Ms. Deepali Walia, visited Working Women's Forum(India) on 20 June 2015 to formally invite Dr.Jaya Arunachalam as an advisory board member of their committee, a new national organization towards serving the comprehensive needs of Co-operative business in northern parts of India. Mr. Hemant Sharma highlighted that his organization acts as a facilitator, convener, strategic and financing partner for the grassroots co-operative societies. Ms.Deepali Walia quoted “the whole concept is quite enthusiastic. The steps taken for the women empowerment are truly inspiring and bring to sense of exuberance to do better for upliftment for women.” 

Prof. Anand Agrawal, Asian Institute of Management, Manila, Philippines visited Working Women's Forum (India) on 27 June 2015 not only to renew the collaboration but also wanted to find out other institutions of management. Prof. Anand Agarwal, after



Prof. Anand Agarwal, listening WWF programmes

meeting the field organizers/supervisors said that the stories you have shared are inspiring and it gives me a glimpse of your life, organization and that of Dr. Jaya Arunachalam. He quoted “no words to match, it's very inclusive and a meaningful work that has been done for years.”



Mr. Murlidharan, Director, Catalyst Management Services Pvt. Ltd, Bengaluru accompanied by his team of four members visited WWF on 30 June 2015. They wanted to know the procedures to establish a multi-state cooperative and learn the working aspects of the Indian Cooperative Network for Women, a multi-state cooperative and if possible to replicate the same in their places of work. They are working among the women sex workers who are exploited/cheated. Therefore they wanted to know whether a multi-state cooperative model could work in future. President, WWF enlightened on their requirement, mission, structure, training and on the working model of the organization. They also desired to visit the rural branch and visited the Kancheepuram branch to observe/study.



It is indeed a matter of great pride for India that by merit worldwide, Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW was 3<sup>rd</sup> on the selected list for the position of UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva by open application out of 26 countries that applied for it. There were 24 eligible candidates for this vacancy.

The Consultative Group of five Ambassadors from Geneva that interviewed her made the following comments on their official website: “Ms. Azad is the elected President of the Indian Cooperative Network for Women, which is a mass movement providing micro-loans to poor women workers. She is also the Chairperson of the Independent Commission for People's Rights and Development, a national advocacy coalition to protect the rights and development of the poor. She worked as a technical consultant with the Women's Ministry of India and was a consultant with the Asian Development Bank. The Consultative Group noted her social activism and dedication to fighting poverty and gender based violence.”

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam was invited as the advisory board member of National Cooperative Development & Advisory Council Ltd. (NACDAC), Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. The institution plans to work under the aegis of renowned co-operators, thinkers, scholars, performers, reformers & co-operative crusaders with unbound experience and have contributed & facilitated the co-operative both at the regional & national level.

## National/International Events

### Participation in Seminars/Conferences

President and her colleagues from WWF attended the birth centenary celebration of Shri. Kamalnayan Bajaj, industrialist/philanthropist organized by Sankara Nethralaya, an eye care outfit on 24 January 2015. Shri. Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former governor of West Bengal as chief guest while addressing the gathering stated that in the bygone era, it has been marked by political integrity and non-opportunistic philanthropy, people might have differed on issues and questioned their leaders, but they remained united. 

As one of the trustee of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Trust, Dr. Jaya Arunachalam attended the board meeting held on 27 February 2015 at New Delhi. The meeting discussed on the need for space for library, improvement of building, distribution of grants from the accumulated funds and the other activities to be carried on to propagate the ideas of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel among the youth. 

### Women's Day Celebrations



Dr. Jaya Arunachalam felicitated on Women's Day

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam was honored as women achiever on the eve of International Women's Day Celebration i.e., on 7 March 2015 by Tamil Nadu Congress Committee felicitating her contribution to the welfare of women. 



Panel discussion at Accenture, Chennai

Accenture a leading IT business outfit at Perungalathur, Chennai invited Dr. Jaya Arunachalam for panel discussion on 3 March 2015 on the topic "Listen, Learn and Lead" along with the most needed theme 'Men as Advocates for Gender Diversity'. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Priya Athreyee and Ms.Chanchu Raman. Over 500 participants attended the discussion. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam addressed how she promoted Working Women's Forum (India) by learning and listening, and she not only promoted the poor women but also led them by facilitating towards empowerment process. On the topic men as advocates of gender diversity Ms. Arunachalam said when men do consider themselves as agent of social change they will certainly do if and when required. Concluding her speech she said the revelation of truth from the experience of WWF reveal that women are

not secondary entities but are equal partners and in many families are alternate head of the households contributing much more to the family and the society. 



Dr. Jaya Arunachalam addressing women at Kalyanmayee

As chief guest, Dr. Jaya Arunachalam attended the International Women's Day 2015 at Kalyanmayee, a women's Welfare Association of Airports Authority of India on 9 March 2015. The programme was celebrated with great zeal, enthusiasm, fervor and with commitment to the welfare of the women who are in need. Speaking on the theme i.e., "Empowering Women...Make it happen", she shared her rich experience of over 30 years with reference to socio-economic problems, various issues of employed/working women and the collective way of solving the same through collective consciousness of those affected. 

Dr. Nandini Azad, President Indian Cooperative Network for Women was invited to deliver the inaugural address for the National Conference on Gender Equality through Women Empowerment in Cooperatives and Agricultural organized by the IFFCO Foundation, New Delhi on 9 March 2015 on the eve of International Women's Day Celebration.



Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW at IFFCO, New Delhi

She lamented the increasing feminization of agriculture with little or no resources at hand. Only 20% of women across the world own land while sharing greater work load. In the context, cooperatives can play an important role. Cooperatives can promote a more active role of women in management of agriculture produce, collective bargaining and active decision making. She appreciated IFFCO Foundations' initiative of leadership development of women in cooperatives.

Dr. Azad added that it is imperative that a priority role be given to co-operatives in JanDhan, Mudra Bank, Make in India ventures of the government. She urged the government to support co-operatives as an alternative business model that could deliver effectively. She opined that co-operatives contribute to stable and resilience economies and if promoted, the economy would be more diverse and better equipped to provide sustainable growth/jobs to women. She listed the support required from the government in terms of investment, enabling environment, legal framework for necessary control and ownership, especially women.

She highlighted the gender and equity model of Indian Cooperative Network for Women whereby Women members manage 14 cooperatives and 200 businesses. The cooperative membership has grown to 2.5 lakh members, and has disbursed loan of Rs.300 crore with a track record of 99% repayment. The reason for success is creating an enabling and comfortable space for women, identification of beneficiary, and training of women members to rise to managerial positions within the cooperative. 

Dr. Nandini Azad President ICNW was invited as Chair and Speaker to the two day workshop on “Promoting Micro Finance for Economic Development in the IORA region” held on 8-9 April 2015 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was hosted by the Government of Bangladesh in collaboration with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). It was inaugurated by the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. The Finance Minister was also present. It focused on knowledge sharing and best practices in the implementation of micro finance scheme and poverty alleviation programmes etc. in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 8 to 9 April, 2015.



Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW chairing the session at IORA, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr. Azad chaired the first Plenary on the 8 April, 2015 entitled ‘The Inherent Synergy between Micro-finance and Development in Member States’ where she emphasized that maximizing security in the region would be a reality only when economic exclusion would be minimized. On the 9 April, she spoke on ‘Engendering financial inclusion for poverty alleviation.’ In this regard, she spoke on the role of micro-finance as a tool to alleviate poverty. She also traced the history of the micro-finance movement in India right from its inception, its role in alleviating poverty, in empowering poor women, and its strengths and challenges.

Citing the classic case study of the Indian Cooperative Network for Women, she observed that In an environment of powerlessness, the Working Women's Forum (WWF) promoted Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) intervened to help poor women create the foundations of a development model based on altered gender relations, by challenging structural poverty, spearheading social integration, and by transforming labour into capital with the surplus retained for poor women's needs.

Speaking on the need for financial inclusion, Dr. Azad also cited the steps taken by the present government in India in the form of the Pradhan Mantri JanDhan Yojana (PMJDY). The program is vast in nature and a national priority, she said. It provides every household an opportunity to access banking and credit services, she added. 

Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW visited the Kancheepuram and Vellore branches on 17 & 18 April 2015. She reviewed the branches

to learn about their functioning in terms of membership and default collection and advised them to do their best for the branches to function profitably. ■

Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW held meetings with the staff, supervisors and organizers on 22 April 2015 & 2 May 2015. In these meetings the president ICNW appreciated Vellore branch for performing well and the need to study the branch. Further some of the points discussed in the meeting are: organizers should limit number of loan members to avoid the default crises, proper timing for members to attend training sessions that has to be made mandatory to receive loans; supervisors/trainers should provide two consolidated reports each month to the President WWF/ICNW on social issues and financial improvement of members who were given loans for social/economic performance data; trainers should collect and report improvement status of members for Management Information System (MIS) etc. ■

Dr. Rebecca Tavares, Regional Representative of UN Women in India, visited the Bengaluru and Chennapatna branches on 5 May 2015. Dr.Nandini Azad welcomed and highlighted about the WWF/ICNW details and programmes. Later Dr. Tavares interacted with the members and witnessed the scale of improvement which has taken place in their life and business. Dr. Tavares appreciated the activities of the organization that she had studied at Harvard and said it makes her feel proud to know about Indian women, their hard work and dedication to the family and business. Particularly, she praised the legendary work of Dr. Jaya Arunachalam,

President, WWF, who she hoped to meet and the internationally renowned Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW who she had evinced interest to visit the WWF and ICPRD 'Men and Boys' against gender based violence program. ■

Dr. Vijayaragavan, Principal of Madras School of Social Work, Chennai invited Dr.Jaya Arunachalam as chief guest for the inaugural function of the first year UG/PG degree programmes for the new academic year 2015-16. Dr.Raja Samuel, Head, Department of Social Work welcomed the chief guest and the 63<sup>rd</sup> batch of students. Mr. C.D Jose, President gave the presidential address, Dr. Subashini Dean of self-finance courses said that the chief guest was instrument in changing women's lives as a torch bearer of leadership. The felicitation was done by Mr.A.Loyola, secretary appreciated that many important dignitaries like Late Prime Minister Shri. Rajiv Gandhi, Late President Shri. R. Venkataraman, Queen Mother Juliana of Netherlands, Madam Hillary Clinton visited WWF knowing the outstanding work of WWF.

Addressing the students and dignitaries Dr.Jaya Arunachalam felt that it's an honor to



Dr. Jaya Arunachalam addressing the students at Madras School of Social Work, Chennai

address them as she has chosen the career of social work/ social activism. She also added that she is familiar with the founder of MSSW, Madam Mary Clubwala Jadhav and had opportunity to work with her in the Women Volunteer Service headed by Madam Smt. Shah, consort of the then Governor. She

paid rich tributes to Madam Mary Clubwala, a great personality who then was the first person to initiate the concept of social work. After sharing experience of 30 years in the field of social work Dr. Jaya Arunachalam wished the students to come up in life and do better academically, professionally and personally. 

## Internship in Working Women's Forum (India)

Working Women's Forum (India) as part of its programme provides internship opportunity for students to gain an insight on grassroot work and spread awareness among younger generation. WWF this time accommodated Vidya Pritha and Keerthana, students of MSW, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai was in the WWF from 4 December 2014 to 19 March 2015 as part of their internship. Similarly Ala B Bala and Janani K students of Stella Maris, Chennai went through their internship from 2 February to 31 March 2015. The students observed the functional aspects of the organization, programmes/activities and also visited field areas in Chennai to know about the impact of WWF/ICNW programmes among women.

The Madras School of Social work students also visited the Kamaraj Illam and conducted two classes for the children. They also had a meeting with supervisors to find out whether they have further plan. To quote Keerthana “ecstasy is the word that best expresses my emotion while interning in an institution that reverberates the cause of the Indian women in its every breath. That this is resoundingly echoed by the staff of WWF add further to its lore. The feminist in me was rekindled and

polished during my tenure here”. Ms. Pritha said she received good exposure both personally and professionally.

Ms. Janani of Stella Maris College commented that the achievement of the organization proves that it makes a conscious effort to identify and help the underprivileged women aiming to serve them beyond financial help such as training is unique and wins appreciation world over. And Ala expressed that “After interning we have learnt a lesson of our life. The sheer dedication, compassion and humility helping mentality etc with which each one of them work are few important qualities which we would like to inculcate in our daily lives. This was an experience of a lifetime.”



Discussion with supervisors

# GROOTS



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## **WE NEED YOUR INPUTS!!!**

Letters, Ideas, Comments for our Newsletter

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## What Readers Say about GROOTS

Thank you for sending me the latest GROOTS. I support you on the far-sightedness of the editorial...

*Shri. Gopal Krishna Gandhi  
Former Governor, West Bengal*

Your journal GROOTS was merging with relevant and useful information. The layout, forms, content are quite good... I wish you and your team for further growth and development

*Dr. K. Malaisamy IAS (R)  
Former Member of Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha*

Groots information was very useful. The Groots can cover more news about women's development and children

*R.K. Rangan,  
State General Secretary  
Inoda - Auto Drivers & Passengers Welfare Association*