

Shikshakara Sadana, Bangalore, on 24th September 2009. Dr. M. Ramegowda KAS, Deputy Commissioner (Welfare), BBMP, gave a presentation on BBMP's welfare schemes and the procedures, rules and regulations to be followed when applying for benefits under the schemes.

The participants raised the following issues: corruption involved in the programmes; need for training programmes for the staff; representation to be given to slum-dwellers and NGOs in zonal selection committees; increasing awareness regarding the schemes; increasing the number of beneficiaries under micro-credit schemes, etc. They also suggested measures to refine the policies and regulations of the scheme. Dr. Ramegowda clarified doubts and accepted to conduct awareness and training programmes in each of BBMP's zones.

Interventions on PDS

(Public Distribution System)

Awareness programme on Citizens' Charter of Dept. of Food & Civil Supplies

SCM House, 18th June 2009



Central DD Mr Shivakumar releasing leaflets prepared by CREAT

An awareness programme for NGOs of Bangalore Urban district on the Citizens' Charter of the Dept. of Food & Civil Supplies was organized by CIVIC in association with CREAT. Pamphlets of CREAT explaining the rights of citizens with regard to the PDS were released by the Deputy Director of Central Range, Dept. of F&CS

State-Level Consultation on the National Food Security Bill

Vishranthi Nilaya, 20th August 2009

CIVIC is a constituent of the Right to Food Campaign – Karnataka (RFC-K) affiliated to the National Right to Food Campaign. In the context of the Centre preparing a draft Food Security Bill, a series of preparatory meetings – on 29th July, 10th August and 18th August – were held in Bangalore, some of them facilitated by CIVIC and CFAR. CIVIC participated in a symbolic hunger protest on 15th August 2009 at the Mahatma Gandhi Statue against the proposed Bill curtailing PDS entitlements. Hunger protests were held across the state at several district headquarters and memoranda submitted to the Deputy Commissioners.

An effort was made to gather suggestions on the draft bill from a wide array of stakeholders, especially the disadvantaged, by inviting associations of domestic workers, HIV+ persons, sexual minorities, tribals, physically and mentally challenged, farmers and NGOs. A state-level consultation was organized on 20th August 2009 at Vishranthi Nilaya. Executive Trustee of CIVIC summarized the key provisions in the Centre's Concept Note on the Food Security Bill at these consultations. A list of Essential Demands of RFC-K on the Right to Food were drawn up and memoranda highlighting these were submitted to the Centre and the State Food Minister, several MLAs and MLCs, State Food Secretary and Commissioner, etc. A press meet was held highlighting the demands and the drawbacks in the current form of the draft bill.

Executive trustee of CIVIC also made a presentation of the Essential Demands of RFC - Karnataka at the National Consultation in New Delhi on 17th September 2009. **The chief demands of Karnataka were the universalisation of the PDS; removal of the distinction between BPL and APL and the cap of five units per family; individual entitlement of 14Kg of cereals, 1.5 Kg of dal and 0.5 litre of oil per person per month; and 'no' to food coupons. It can be seen as a victory of RFC-K that all these demands now find a place in the Essential Demands framed by the National Right to Food Campaign.**

State-Level Consultation with Fair-Price Shop-Owners

Shikshakara Sadana, 17th November 2009



Mr. Muniswamy Nayudu, Deputy Director, North Range, Dept. of Food and Civil Supplies, Mr. Kariyappa, President, State Fair-price Shop-owners' Association; Mr. D.M. Halaswamy, Hon. President, and other office-bearers of the association, meet to discuss their problems.

AA major finding of CIVIC's surveys was the unviability of the private PDS shops. Hence, a state-level consultation to discuss the problems faced by shop-owners and to put forth their demands before the government was organized by CIVIC along with CFAR at Shikshakara Sadana, Bangalore, on 17th November 2009. Mr. Muniswamy Nayudu, Deputy Director, North Range, Dept. of Food and Civil Supplies, Mr. Kariyappa, President, State Fair-price Shop-owners' Association; Mr. D.M. Halaswamy, Hon. President, and other office-bearers of the association were present at the discussion as dignitaries. Fair-price shop-owners' association representatives from all over Karnataka (Haveri, Bellary, Mysore, Bangalore, Davangere, Mandya, Bidar, Madduru, Chikkamagaluru, Harihara and Hospet) contributed to the discussion through their presence.

CIVIC's Programme Coordinator, Mr. Ramamurthy, presented a brief report on the survey conducted jointly by CIVIC and CFAR at 28 PDS shops in Bangalore Urban on "the problems faced by the shop owners in Bangalore". In Bangalore there are 1386 shops and a total 10,87,000 cards among which 18% are BPL cards.

Ms. Sudha, Programme Coordinator, CFAR, presented the Supreme Court orders containing the criteria for BPL and Anthyodaya cards, the quantity of food grains to be distributed, etc. She pointed out that the Supreme Court orders are often being violated, either while identifying the eligible beneficiaries or while distributing commodities.

Mr. Muniswamy Nayudu, concluded the session with the assurance that he would bring these demands to the notice of the Commissioner, Dept. of Food and Civil Supplies.

Interventions on education Directives to Education Dept. on *suo motu* disclosures under the RTI Act

To test the implementation of the RTI Act at various levels in the Education Department, RTI applications were filed by CIVIC, asking for the mandatory (*suo motu*) disclosures under Section 4(1)(b) of the Right to Information Act from the level of the State education department, the SSA and BEOs to the school HM's level. It was revealing that the HMs of two schools, one in Deshyanagar and one in K.R. Puram confessed that they did not know anything about the RTI Act.

When proper replies or timely replies were not received, CIVIC went in appeal to the Karnataka Information Commission (KIC).

SDMCs bring changes in the schools



Ms. Kathyayini Chamaraj Speaking to SDMC members

CIVIC has begun looking closely into five schools that the children from our select communities in Deshyanagar and Rajiv Gandhi Nagar attend. CIVIC began engaging with the schools through the School Development & Monitoring Committees (SDMCs). Regular SDMC meetings were never being held earlier in the high school in K.R. Puram. Decisions regarding the use of school funds were not being taken by the SDMC. All decisions were taken by the headmaster/principal alone and he used to merely send the cheques to the SDMC chairman for signature.

Pictures of the poor status of the school's water and toilet facilities, disused computer room, broken desks and benches, etc., were taken by CIVIC and shown to the SDMC members. Thereafter they were trained on the proper constitution of the SDMC and their roles and responsibilities.

Immediately after the training, the HM called a meeting of the SDMC members, nine of whom are parents of the school children, and asked them to elect a new president as the earlier president's child was no longer studying in the school. **After the training, SDMC members began to play a more active role. The SDMC wrote to the concerned authorities requesting the appointment of a teacher for computer education, which was immediately done. They decided to meet the local MLA for financial assistance to improve the school. Dysfunctional taps in the school were repaired and better washing facilities for children created.** There is however resistance from the ground level (school authorities) to the empowerment of the SDMC undertaken by CIVIC. Therefore we are involving the higher officials and engaging with the system from the top as well. Empowerment of the SDMCs has resulted in a positive school environment.

The water taps were changed and reconstructed after SDMC awareness programs and meetings at K.R.Puram school



Interventions on health *suo moto* disclosures under Section 4(1) (b) sought from hospitals

CIVIC has targeted one Primary Health Centre (PHC), one general hospital, one maternity home and one referral hospital, which are serving the communities in the two wards. RTI applications seeking information on the mandatory suo motu disclosures under Section 4(1)(b) have reached the second appeal stage and complaints on non-compliance of suo motu disclosures have been filed with the State Information Commission. The referral hospital tried to scare the applicant coordinator by misleading her and asking for a huge fee to provide the information.

Applications for 'Anganwadis on Demand'

Analysis of the base-line survey in the two select communities in Deshyanagar and K. R. Puram revealed that there were enough 0-6 children in both the sites to seek 'Anganwadis on demand' as per the SC ruling in the Right to Food case. Now for both locations, applications have been filed with the Dept. of Women and Child Development as per the SC orders for providing Anganwadis.

RTI activities

CIVIC is facilitating the activities of the forum of RTI Activists – KRIA Katte. CIVIC is the secretariat for KRIA Katte which meets and deliberates on the means of improving the implementation of the RTI Act. KRIA Katte is facilitating the RTI project of CIVIC through an MoU

Details of CIVIC's interventions are available on the Official blog of CIVIC:

<http://civic-bangalore.blogspot.com>

Domain-wise details are available at:

Ward works:

<http://civiconurbangovernance.blogspot.com>

SJSRY: <http://civiconsjsry.blogspot.com>

Health: <http://civicpublichealth.blogspot.com>

Food:

<http://civibangaloreonpds.blogspot.com/2009/12/blog-post.html>

Education: <http://civicbloneducation.blogspot.com/>

Water: <http://civic-waterissues.blogspot.com>

Meeting with Principal Secretary DPAR, *Janaspandana*, on 27.06.2009



CIVIC and KRIA -katte meet DPAR to discuss the issues of RTI

The Joint Director of Information Department was invited. The importance of creating awareness on RTI and having a separate budget for it was stressed upon him. As a result, one can see several hoardings across the city providing information to citizens on the Right to Information Act and how to use it.

CIVIC also stressed the lack of implementation of proactive suo motu disclosure under Section 4(1) even after circulars from DPAR to all Principal Secretaries. DPAR has taken up time-bound action plans which will be followed up on quarterly basis

Meeting with the Commissioners of Karnataka Information Commission on

04.07.2009



CIVIC and KRIA Katte met the Commissioner to review the actions taken on old decisions

CIVIC and KRIA Katte met the Commissioners to review the actions taken on old decisions and plan for new initiatives. The unruly behavior of one Commissioner towards activists was brought to the notice of the SCIC. Many issues were discussed and actions agreed upon like on the Commission evolving a model suo motu disclosure.

Meeting with His Excellency, the Governor, Mr. H.R. Bharadwaj, to press for more information commissioners *on 6th August 2009*

Given the increasing pendency of cases – more than 6,000 - at the Karnataka Information Commission which is preventing applicants from getting information even after 180 days, members of KRIA Katte sought and were given an appointment with His Excellency, the Governor of Karnataka, Sri H. R. Bharadwaj to raise their concerns. KRIA Katte members, along with CIVIC, pointed out that there were currently only four Information Commissioners (ICs), though the law allowed ten and this was causing the delays in disposing of the RTI appeals and complaints. KRIA Katte sought the appointment of public-spirited individuals who have gained eminence in public life from fields other than that of administration as ICs. The Governor was also requested to look into the lack of meetings of the High-Powered Committee on RTI, and cases of some ICs entertaining third parties during hearings and being partial to officials. The Governor assured the delegation that he would discuss the issues with the CM.

RTI Day celebration

-10th October 2009 at Shikshakara Sadana



CIVIC along with KRIA Katte, PAC, CREAT and CHRI celebrated RTI Day on 10th October 2009 at Shikshakara Sadana. Hon'ble Justice Sri Santosh Hegde, Lokayuktha, Sri K. K. Mishra, SCIC, Mr. Thippeswamy, SIC, Mr. Tapan Senapathy, Principal Secretary, DPAR, were the chief guests. Mr. Venkatesh Nayak of CHRI gave the key-note address.

Mr. Venkatesh Nayak lauded the RTI Act for having brought about transparency and reduced corruption in government. He denied that RTI was being used to disclose national secrets or that it was slowing down government machinery. It had made officials more careful in their file notings. But the goal of an informed citizenry had not yet been achieved. Free trade agreements were being negotiated but citizens were unaware of the details. Grama sabhas were not happening. Citizens needed to be vigilant to ensure that RTI was not curtailed. Educated citizens also had a duty to ensure that the dispossessed got their rights. Misuse of RTI had to be curtailed to prevent RTI Act being amended adversely.

Hon'ble Justice Santosh Hegde that RTI was a means not merely to check corruption but to prevent injustice in administration and that 90% of the work of the Lokayuktha pertained to the latter. As the Lokayuktha had no suo motu powers to investigate, citizens needed to scrutinize the affidavits on assets and liabilities filed by elected representatives and report errors so that action could be initiated by the Lokayuktha.

The CAG had in its report for 2007-08 revealed that under the eight flagship schemes of the Central government, no accounts had been submitted for Rs. 50,000 crore. There had been no investigation and no reply given by the government. **Rs. 84 lakh crore had been given out as subsidies to the poor since Independence. But only 8,400 crore would have reached the poor out of this, if only 10 paise out of every rupee was reaching them, as was widely believed. "Then where did the rest of the money go?" he questioned.**

Justice Hegde narrated the travails of the poor who were made to run to various departments to claim benefits. He called for a single-window delivery mechanism for them. Though revenue records were perpetual documents, 17 years' revenue records of lands in and around the new Bangalore International Airport had gone missing. Citizens needed to ask questions on all such issues.

Sri K.K.Mishra praised the vibrant civil society in Karnataka and also the reviews of the RTI Act done by civil society. He suggested that common service centres set up by the government should also receive RTI applications to make it easy for citizens to file applications. He called upon all secretariat departments to appoint a nodal officer for implementing the RTI in all aspects. He could keep lists of the public authorities (PAs) and PIOs coming under the department provide the mandatory quarterly reports to KIC, monitor performance of RTI by all PAs, including Section 4 (1) disclosures, department's compliance of the KIC's orders, follow-up of disciplinary action, etc. Another recommendation was to create a State-level RTI Cell as a knowledge resource centre to conduct trainings and awareness on RTI, bring out a newsletter, etc.

Mr. Anil Kumar of KRIA Katte presented an analysis of the suo motu disclosures of several service agencies of Bangalore. Mr. S. R. Venkatram of Supraja presented their experiences on using RTI to audit road-works in their ward and taking the matter to the Lokayuktha when BBMP failed to act on their findings of false billing by contractors. The Lokayuktha had directed the BBMP Commissioner to implement the suggestions made by Supraja for improving ward works in four pilot wards. Mr. Y.G.Muralidharan moderated the lively discussion with participants that followed.

“Local Welfare in a Global Context: Slums and Urban Welfare in Karnataka's Development”

– talk by Dr. Supriya RoyChowdhury of ISEC

Wednesday, 23rd September 2009, at Ashirwad

“What happens to the urban poor in the context of a growing city...?” This question posed by Dr. Supriya RoyChowdhury, Professor,



Centre for Political Institutions, Governance and Development, Institute for Social and Economic Change, led to her study “Local Welfare in a Global Context: Slums and Urban welfare in Karnataka's Development”. CIVIC Bangalore organized a discussion on the study at Ashirwad, Bangalore, on 23rd September 2009. Mr. Narayana Swamy, Joint Director, and Mr. Divakar, Executive Engineer, of KSCB were present at the programme.

Dr. Chowdhury said that the limited benefits that accrued to slum dwellers “have happened almost as an accidental spin off and not the result of any well-formulated policy to integrate the urban underclass with a city's growing economy, either through state support – manifested in specific programs designed for the poor (education, skills, vocational training) – or through private sector efforts to create a context for the inclusion of the poor.”

The work of NGOs was concentrated on international funding requirements of writing projects, getting a grant, and showing some “results” in terms of children going to school, or so many toilets built. “There is little or no attention to the interconnected nature of urban poverty,” the professor said, “and the importance of livelihood to access all other services”.

“Genetically modified food: How does this matter to a common man?”

Monday, 7th December 2009 at Institution of Agricultural Technologists (IAT), Bangalore

There are various views floated by scientists, industry, farmers and consumer groups on the pros and cons of GM food crops. CIVIC invited both factions for a panel discussion to create awareness among ordinary citizens about GM foods so that they could make informed choices on the vital issue of what foods they wish to eat.

Dr. Devinder Sharma, well-known journalist, agri-biotechnology consultant and chairman of the Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security, called upon people to raise their voice against the control of food production in the hands of a few MNCs resulting in the deprivation of the farmers in India. He cited the successful example of organic farming on a 200-acre farm in Andhra Pradesh which had proven that it was possible to obtain high yields without using harmful chemicals.

Dr. Narayan Reddy, a national award winning organic farmer, questioned why brinjal had been chosen for genetic manipulation, if the idea was to provide food for the hungry. Brinjal was not a staple food and there was currently no dearth of brinjal.

Dr. T. M. Manjunath, Ex-Director, Monsanto Research Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security, presented data to prove that without the Green Revolution, India would not have been self-sufficient in food today. He decried those belittling the scientific community and their contributions, including that of GM foods. Prof. Ramanjinigowda of the University of Agricultural Sciences also spoke in favour of GM foods.

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