



**The Second National Workshop of Lok Manch
23 – 25 November 2016, Pune**

Under the banner of Lok Manch (Peoples' platform/forum), 120 social activists representing 100 grassroots organizations from 12 States, gathered at PG Block, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Campus, Ramwadi, Pune, Maharashtra, for a three-day national workshop which was inaugurated by Fr Edward Mudavassery, Rector of De Nobile College, on 23 November 2016. Speaking at the occasion, he appreciated the efficacy of Lok Manch, and pointed out that Lok Manch conformed to Gandhi's Talisman of restoring to the poorest and the weakest their dignity and the control over their own life and destiny. "The constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity are non-negotiable and can never be compromised," articulated Fr Edward who is also the former President of South Asian Assistency (POSA). The inaugural session witnessed the release of a book *Access to Entitlements of the Marginalized: Report Card* and an eight-page folder *Development and Access to Entitlements of the Marginalized: National Report Card*. Both of these – published by Lok Manch Secretariat – were the outcome a study on 12 Indian States and the fruit of the hard work of Joe Xavier, Joy and some other friends. In addition, another book *Nala Thitta Kaiyedu (Handbook of Welfare Schemes)*, published by Tamil Nadu Lok Manch, was also released at the function. The first copies of these books were received by Sornalata and Nawal, two of the participants, and by the distinguished guests: Edward M, Ed F, Paul C, Marcos I and Benazir L.

In his written message to the participants, Fr. George Pattery, POSA, appreciated the participants and their teams for working to empower the adivasis, dalits, and other marginalized sections of the society, and to bring hope to them.

A complimentary note from Patxi, Secretary, Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, Rome, was read out. Then, the assembly paid silent homage to Sabu Malayil, one of the social activists from Kerala, who had passed away just the previous day. He had espoused the cause of the migrant labourers in Kerala.

The inaugural session was followed by presentations by experts. **Shri P.S. Krishnan, IAS (Retd.)** shed light on Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) and the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) that are meant for channelizing the flow of resources from the general sectors in the Central Ministries/ Departments towards the development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in proportion to their numbers in the population. He decried the diversion and underutilization of funds earmarked for SCSP and TSP. Mr Krishnan's presentation left the assembly convinced that the poverty of the masses could be brought to an end, and that the population belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes could well be freed from all types of exploitation and oppression – through appropriate and people-monitored implementation of SCSP, TSP.

In the next session, Mr Jayant V Deshpande, State Consultant, Sanitation, UNICEF, Mumbai, emphasized that the new Scheme – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) – was closely related to the life cycle of a person: birth, health of children, adolescence, menstrual hygiene, pregnancy, disease, death etc. He touched upon various government projects like Swachh Bharat Mission, Waste Management, Kaya Kalp (Primary Health Centre and Toilet management). He underscored the importance of community mobilization, capacity building, and the monitoring of program implementation. Thus, the assembly of activists also learnt how WASH could help raise the standard of life of millions of marginalized and oppressed people.

In the afternoon, Lalit Tirkey, Director, HLDRC, West Bengal, presented an overview of the **Pro-poor schemes** from **central and state governments**. He also threw light on the eligibility criteria and the requirements for accessing Housing Schemes, Employment Schemes and Pension Schemes etc. He did not hesitate to point out the ground realities and the challenges. He underlined the need for making people computer-literate so as enable them to fill and submit forms online.

The second session in the afternoon was a panel discussion. Panelists Lalit Tirkey, PS Krishnan IAS, and Jayant Deshpande suggested the following: a) Organizing a team of good and committed lawyers to champion the causes of SCs and STs; b) Mobilizing Communities for accessing, monitoring and demanding their rights.

The last session on Day I was a presentation by Selvaraj of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru. He delineated the training modules for the SCSP and TSP: (1) Introduction, (2) Purpose of SCSP & TSP, (3) Supportive institutions for SCP — at National, State and District levels, (4) Supportive Institution for TSP – at National, State and District Levels, (5) Accountability and Penalties, (6) Approach, (7) Essential information on SCSP and TSP (for example, funds available from the Central, State and UT should be utilized within the stipulated time; SCP & TSP funds are to be given to SCs and STs as credit through banks, cooperatives and other public sector financial institutions.

At the fag end of the day, Dr Dinesh and Dr Konrad shared their plan for conducting an organizational survey, and invited the host of activists to agree to the survey as the same would be in the interest of the activists' organizations. Everyone agreed to do so!

The second day of the workshop was devoted to a reflective, evaluative process. The participants demonstrated their efforts, struggles, challenges, and the emerging big picture of Lok Manch – through creative portrayals like street theatre and role plays. They highlighted two facts: (a) Lok Manch is growing into a broad-based movement; (b) the people have begun to own up Lok Manch. However, a few groups pointed out that the organizations that are accompanying the stakeholders need to be more sensitive to their aspirations, respond positively and put them in the forefront. We also need to work hard among the stakeholders so that they own up Lok Manch entirely. The National Secretariat team of Lok Manch also shared its own challenges and difficulties, one of them being the undue delay in getting the reports from the units and the zones.

About 12.30 pm, Paul from the London Jesuit Mission congratulated the participants on their collaboration, competence and professionalism; he also appealed to them to work for the uplift and empowerment of the poor and the marginalized with a high ambition.

Then followed an open discussion where the following points emerged: a) we have learnt many things that we will take to the people we serve; b) Lok Manch as a people's movement is gaining momentum; c) we have become acutely aware of the need to stand together extending mutual

support and collaboration; d) there was no conflict of identities between the host organization and the Lok Manch. One reverberating question emerged: Could Lok Manch do anything about the demonetization of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 currency notes? A deep concern was raised about the negative impact of demonetization on people's capacity to buy rations.

Later, Joe Xavier, the Lok Manch Consultant, offered many a clarification on the reporting template; he insisted that the first ten line items on the template be strictly followed. Then, the participants broke into zone-wise or state-wise groups and actively engaged in a discussion, trying to find answers to the following four questions posed by Joe Xavier: 1. What concrete lessons have we learnt from OTHER units? 2. What plans do we have so as to strengthen partnership, especially with likeminded / secular partners to achieve our Goal, Objectives and indicators? 3. Are there any conflicting areas / concerns or capacity development areas that we need to work on to achieve 80 % of our goal as per our log-frame? 4. How can we face emerging new challenges in making Lok Manch a platform for building a people's Movement, a force to reckon at the state and national level?

After a long and engrossing discussion, the participants reassembled for a plenary session and shared their answers and findings. They said they had learnt the importance of prompt and detailed documentation and of sharing the reports with parties concerned, and the advantages of collaboration and networking with likeminded groups or organizations. The zonal as well as state-wise teams proposed their plans to identify prospective likeminded groups to foster issue-based collaboration, especially on special days like Human Rights Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, International Women's day and so on. The interference by rival NGOs and influences by political parties and communal forces were viewed by the groups as areas of concern. The groups took note of the following new challenges: governments' moves to replace food ration with money doles, to introduce new forest laws, to create cumbersome institutions like CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority), and to apply the FCRA on NGOs beyond the pale. Nevertheless, they expressed their resolve to take on these new challenges courageously and competently!

On 25 November, the third and the final day of the workshop, there was another absorbing and enlightening discussion by the floor that was moderated by Stany of Gujarat and Jerald of Karnataka. The participants decried the government policies that are impeding the works of Lok Manch and similar NGOs. There was a lot of sharing by various persons about their courageous and efficient ways of surmounting the obstacles that came their way. Some members pointed out the fact that initially the local organisations were at the forefront and the people at the back; but now Lok Manch has placed the people at the forefront, keeping itself only as a driving force. They happily acknowledged that Lok Manch is a bottom-up process: an empowerment process that keeps evolving by sensitising the people about their own rights and entitlements. However, caution was raised that any kind of overly confrontational activities might go against the interest of Lok Manch and against that of the people themselves. When the discussion revolved around FCRA, the members opined that there was no need to be overly obsessed with it. Denzil Fernandes, Director of Indian Social Institute, Delhi, intervened and made a few relevant observations and cautions. Then Sannybhai and Joe Xavier stressed that the role of partner organizations of Lok Manch is to accompany, to cultivate critical analysis that leads to "action, reflection, action" and to enable them to take right decisions that are good for the people. They also added that a positive, inclusive approach bears much better fruits in the long run. At the end of the discussion, there was a consensus that those who are responsible for Lok Manch must act as informed leaders and

accompany and journey – exercising utmost discretion, caution and prudence – with the people in their protests, marches etc.

Then two distinguished guests addressed the participants. Marcos, ALBOAN, reminded the participants of their mission to build global citizenship so as to fight injustices, to transform situations at local, national and global levels. He added that everyone should come together, join hands, and collaborate without forgetting the main goal. And Edward from the Collaboration Secretariat said: “You give me the hope that much is possible. Your consensus is your strength. And, collaboration helps vibrate that strength. You have empowered the people to demand what the government has promised to them. We work for change but change makes some uncomfortable. What we do here and whatever we do for Lok Manch may change the future of the world. I wish that the Lok Manch process emerge as a successful model which can be replicated elsewhere.” And Matthew Cox, an indigenous American, appreciated the assembly for its efforts to build movements and he sang for them a Lakota song.

Joe Xavier was called upon to shed light on the Activity Matrix. Photo copies were distributed to everyone and each activity was discussed in detail. A lot of questions arose and subsequently a few changes were made on the timeframe of certain activities.

Evaluation of the seminar was done by Benny and Fehmida. The participants gave both written and oral responses expressing tremendous appreciation for the effective and successful organization of the three-day workshop and for the facilities that were available. Anthony Dias of the West Zone thanked one and all. And Sannybhai and Ruby were accorded a standing ovation marking the culmination of the national workshop.

It may be remembered that the workshop in PG Block, JDV campus, Pune – hosted by Indian Social Institutes of Delhi and Bengaluru, Jesuits in Social Action (JESA) and Lok Manch Secretariat – is the second one of its kind. The first national workshop held in Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, during 6-8 April 2016, focused on the National Food Security Act.

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New Delhi