

Women's Tribunal to Hold the State Accountability to End Poverty and Social Exclusion – organized by Tamil Nadu Women's Forum/Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, India

It is now ten years that India has been implementing Millennium Development Goals (MDG)-oriented programs, and some achievements have been made. Yet although the figures and other data made available on the websites of various ministries of the Government of India look very promising, a large number of civil society organizations and women's organizations are pointing out many shortcomings in the achievements.

A second criticism regarding the MDGs is that it is all oriented towards quantitative targets, whilst the changes in figures and data should be reflected in improvements in "quality of life."

To understand how the achievements of MDGs are being translated into improving quality of life, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, together with the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, held a women's tribunal on August 29 and 30, 2010, in Chennai. As many as 200 elected women in Panchayats from 17 districts of Tamil Nadu participated and registered their views. The women were from socially marginalized communities - Dalits, Tribals and Muslims.

Panel discussions were carried out on five major topics – Social Disparities in the Current Context, Challenges for Women's Political Participation, Women and Economic Disparities, Access to Quality Universal Education, and Access to Comprehensive Healthcare Services. Women representatives shared their experiences (testimonies) pertaining to each. Eminent activists and experts were called in as panel speakers, sharpening the perspectives of the women through the panel discussion.

Following is an excerpt from the introductory speech made by Fatima Burnad of Tamil Nadu Women's Forum:

I am extremely glad to welcome all of you, women from 17 districts across Tamil Nadu, who play active roles in Panchayats. This tribunal is organized by the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan in Tamil Nadu.

In a nutshell, the purpose of this tribunal is to ask our Indian & state government *not to break the promise* [Wada na todo] they made at various summits, especially at the UN summit for MDGs; it is to demand what are the schemes framed by the government towards achieving these MDGs; to question them if sufficient steps haven't been taken to achieve the MDGs. New economic policy, privatization and globalization have been prime factors behind Indian poverty. 81% of Adivasis and 65% of Dalits suffer in extreme poverty in India. While, on one hand, we have these MDGs that speak of development, on the other hand, we have the WTO policies that have deprived us of our development and of our wealth. Ten thousand people in a developing country are made to work for the benefit of a rich one thousand. We are provided funds for development, but on strategic adjustment, which worsens our condition.

Our ultimate aim is a society with no caste or gender inequality. The eight MDGs are definitely not an end in itself, but a part in eradicating our poverty and hunger, in improving our life, or in

creating an equal society. Who better to represent the voice of the socially excluded women than the elected women in Panchayats belonging to the same communities? No one can explain better the ground realities – the state of education, health, poverty, gender equality - in your villages than you. We shall document your voices and work towards incorporating in the 12th five-year plan of our government, as well as in the alternative report that will be submitted during the UN Summit in September 2010.

(Source: Tamil Nadu Women's Forum/Wada Na Todo Abhiyan)