

Summary Statements by the Unheard Voices of the Majority

Here below are the statements produced for the Helsinki Process by the thematic working groups of "Unheard Voices of the Majority" at CGP-organised events coinciding with the Helsinki Group New Delhi meeting 5.2.-7.2. 2005.

These statements are based on the full report of the Unheard Voices of the Majority, nearly 400-page Interim Report of which is now published in 4 parts in the web-page of Citizens' Global Platform. Please see web page :

<http://www.globalplatform.fi/en?sid=258>

The Summary Statements below have been edited and finalised according to the decisions taken on 17.3.2005 by the Nagpur meeting of the Indian Co-ordination Committee. The Committee was formed on 7.2.2005 at the concluding session of the "Unheard Voices of the Majority" events.

Preface

The Track reports of the Helsinki Process seek to make the existing global institutions and processes more inclusive and democratic. However, the Tracks do not adequately question their foundations and frameworks. Current economic and military structures of power are maintaining global inequality, poverty, injustice and insecurity in an undemocratic way.

As history has shown, commercial growth does not automatically reduce poverty or result in sustainable human development. Such growth in itself does not necessarily expand human capabilities or substantive freedoms in a sustainable manner. More important than *how much* is produced, are questions of *what is* produced, *by what means and for whom*. Are the products accessible only to a small section of society, those with the most power or wealth, or are they equally accessible to those who need them to fulfill their basic needs in order to survive? Do the techniques of production displace or alienate workers, pollute rivers, air or forests or are the production methods labour-intensive and environmentally sustainable?

Decision-making should be democratised to become more equal and just by ensuring that all, including the 'last person', have equal powers to affect the decisions on the use of world's economic resources.

I. Land, water, forest and the environment.

In the past ten years, liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation have led to land alienation, loss of land fertility, large scale migration from rural areas as well as to thousands of farmers committing suicide in India. All this has reduced the productive use of land, water, forest, biodiversity and agriculture, which maintain the lives of the majority in a sustainable way. It has also restricted the economic freedom of the majority to use land, water, forest and biodiversity for their livelihoods and to exchange seeds and other products.

Land reforms and land redistribution should be undertaken to prevent further land alienation. Privatisation of water, forests, beaches and mountains, as well as gigantic projects changing geography for private interests, such as interlinking of rivers, are to be prohibited. Corporate farming, contract farming and questionable technologies like GM crops are to be viewed with caution as they threaten to bring millions of farmers under the control of companies, undermining the freedom and survival of millions of independent producers. All life forms, including human beings, are constituted of earth, water, air, sunlight, fire and aether/space, which are sacred and pervasive. Human beings should live as the trustees of these elements of life in accordance with the Upanishadic principle "enjoy what you need and renounce the rest, for whose wealth is it?" Elements of cosmos cannot be treated as a mere resource or as mere commodities to be traded. They are needed as necessary elements to sustain life and should not be wasted for other purposes.

A foolish and suicidal path of development and globalisation, that of chasing and mistaking the mirage of money to be happiness, must be halted by the efforts of local communities. Communities should be entrusted with the right and responsibility for their own development. Agricultural prices should be protected from the vagaries of nature and machinations of trade cartels, and agriculture should be removed out of the WTO. Certain zones like the Himalayas, the Western Ghats, the Thar desert and the coastal areas should be declared "pollution and hazard-free zones"; with "development" activities, such as mining, drastically disturbing the ecology, prohibited. In addition to the immediate surroundings, these activities often have long-term effects further away in these regions.

II. Unorganised-Unprotected-Informal Workers

Unprotected labour constitutes about 93% of the workforce in India, and is scattered in agricultural, construction, brick-kiln and more than 150 other forms of employment. The majority of the workers is illiterate, women, Dalits & Adivasi (socially oppressed, even untouchables), who do not have their own livelihood resources or opportunities to adequately feed their families. The official statistics have failed to observe the reality that 74% of the people in rural areas cannot get 2400Kcal/day, and 56% in urban areas cannot get 2100Kcal/day. Neo-liberal economic policies have sharply reduced the prospects of employment in rural areas, due to the fast intensification of agriculture.

Displaced people from the forest and land appropriated in the name of so called development come to cities in search of livelihoods and jobs and become part of the informal sector. Ownership of land and other natural resources is concentrated in few hands.

Due to neo-liberal economic policies and pressures on the local government from international institutions, such as the IMF/WB/WTO, labour and land legislation are being liberalised and thereby livelihood resources are being snatched away from the rural poor and unorganised workers. This section of the workforce is deprived of the core labour standards of the ILO, which include a guarantee to work with minimum and equal wages. These people are also outside the ILO standards concerning forced labour, working conditions, and lack any kind of social security. To correct the situation, where more than 600 million people remain hungry and deprived of their basic human rights, concrete measures and support are required from the Helsinki Process to ensure the following:

1. Employment guarantee legislation must be put into force immediately.
2. Minimum wages from one source of income should cover all basic needs of a family.
3. No to intensification of agriculture. Labour intensive technology to be promoted.
4. Effective implementation of land reforms.
5. Primary education must be accessible to all, compulsory and cost-free.
6. Access to health services should be free and universal.
7. Safe and clean drinking water to be provided for all.
8. Comprehensive legislation for the unorganised, rural and urban workers with a guarantee to employment at national minimum wage and social security including an old-age pension allowance.
9. Quantitative restrictions must be imposed on foreign goods while local, artisan and indigenous industries are to be promoted.
10. Traditional informal, collective and community livelihoods, assets, possessions or practices, which support the realisation of equal basic rights, should be documented, recognised, legalised and protected so that people are not forced into the informal sector as unprotected labour.

III. Survival of Indigenous and Marginalised Livelihoods & Cultural Identities

Nation-state and world bodies should recognise and respect the following aspects in their decision-making:

- a) Indigenous rights of all tribal and all marginalised people to their own livelihoods and self-determination of their territories, development and environment should be recognised. All forced evictions must be stopped immediately. (Tribal inhabited areas, which are not scheduled yet, should be scheduled immediately.)
- b) People have rights to preserve their cultural identities in their natural habitat, including their right to language and meanings in defining their rights, laws and acts, ways of life and means to control their lives. If voluntary relocation is carried out by the tribals, rights of settlements should be ensured. Scheduled Tribe certification should be left with the tribal communities.
- c) Equal rights to education (in mother tongue for the duration of primary level) and health care as well as to traditional sustainable livelihoods should be ensured with equal respect to their own lives, values, meanings, skills, medicinal and nutritional habits and ways of knowledge, observing and understanding.
- d) Everyone has an opportunity and human right to live in a way sustaining the Earth, including access to indigenous sustainable heritage, self-rule and ways of knowledge, which have maintained the world and human heritage through millenniums.

IV. Health

Public Health has two faces; a democratic face with the potential of acting as a lever for improving quality of life of the marginalised sections of society, and an anti-democratic face with its potential for coercion in the name of 'public good'.

The privatisation, liberalisation and global commercialisation of health services in the 1980s and 1990s have resulted in market failure in health care as well as in a poor state of services as demonstrated by the evidence from research in India and other parts of the world. This shows the severely inadequate ability of the private sector or NGOs in ensuring equal access to health, water or other basic services as well as the need for support in low resource base communities. Health is primarily determined by assured livelihoods, food security, clean water and supportive social relationships. Therefore the right to health, food, water and social security is to be equally guaranteed. A mere recognition and encoding of these rights is not adequate - especially as even the existing public services built in the 1950s are now widely dismantled and undermined.

Large sections of the urban poor, rural and tribal populations lack access to basic health care. This makes **strengthening of public services with a Primary Health Care perspective** an imperative. Public services provide the answer from the users' perspective: they need affordable/free health care while the vendors of health products need an assured market. The widespread malpractice in both public and private health services encourages increased expenditure on irrational care and causes increasing health risks from unnecessary medication and medical procedures. Panic scenarios and 'social marketing' build the demand for programmes so that public funds are siphoned into unnecessary measures. **Thus, the advocacy for the implementation of the Right to Health Care should be expanded to Right to Appropriate Health Care with Dignity.**

Human rights of an individual and disease control as a public good have been raised most strongly in recent times in relation to AIDS control. Human rights are universal, but when devising concrete strategies and putting them into practice, specific context-related issues arise, which can become counter-productive if being ignored. This is demonstrated by many examples from AIDS control strategies.

The evidence brought forward on these issues has made clear the following:

- The importance of reaffirming legally enforceable rights as obligations of the state for ensuring basic needs for the marginalised, including health care.
- However, the marginalised have to be identified as a large majority, i.e. the poor and not only as special groups, be they HIV positive people, disabled, people in conflict situations etc., leading to fragmentation and segmentation of people and needs.
- Principles for defining rational and appropriate services as well as quality of services in tune with ground realities of specific contexts are central to ensuring these rights. This must include proven indigenous systems of healing that people have been using for centuries and continue to use today.
- Structures for ensuring accountability of services in both the public and private sectors to the local communities have to be put in place.

V. Impact of Globalisation on Education

Pressures from globalisation and privatisation have made schooling inaccessible for the rural poor, Dalits, tribals and other marginalised communities. While the village communities are well motivated to demand perceivably good quality education for their children, the state avoids its responsibility to primary education.

We demand free and compulsory primary education of a consistent standard for all, together with a transformation and expansion of mainstream schools, so that the poor children of India are assured of quality education.

Education should not be commercialised into a commodity, favouring the rich at the cost of the poor, whose basic right to education remains unfulfilled. What is 'good governance' for business - and for international capital and the large, formal sector - is not good for this poor, socially disadvantaged majority.

Under the prevailing globalisation, the vast majority of the children in India will continue to remain out of formal education. This reinforces discrimination against the poor, Dalits, the tribal people and minorities. Two thirds of each of these social segments are girls. This effectively marginalises the constitutional principle of equality. Rural girls belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as Scheduled Castes or Tribes are perhaps the worst off, with a staggering 50% and 56% respectively having dropped out of formal education. They will be dispensed with para-schooling that has been created to equate education with mere literacy. Instead of

strengthening the mainstream formal schools the government shifts towards tokenism by way of parallel streams that are intended to turn the formal schools into informal para-learning centres, totally devoid of quality, staffed by under-qualified, under-trained and under-paid para-teachers. 20% of the children are left totally without formal education, and while the rich children benefit from pre-schooling, the poor are systematically denied of it. The government seeks to serve the policies and programmes of the IMF and World Bank, distorting its constitutional obligations and keeping the marginalised communities in the periphery, refusing them access and opportunities.