

# **Globalization in India Civil Society Responses<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on research conducted by the author for the Ford Foundation on civil society engagement with institutions of global governance in July 2007



Globalization in India  
Civil Society Responses

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**Cover Design:** Abhijeet Saumitra

**DTP and Printed by :**

**Creators,**

759/97 C, Prabhat Road, Pune 4

**Published by:**

**National Centre for Advocacy Studies,**

Serenity Complex, Ramnagar Colony,

Pashan, Pune 411 021,

Maharashtra, INDIA

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First Published in December 2007

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Supported by Poorest Area Civil Society Programme (PACS)

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## Foreword

Globalization is redefining the language and grammar of our polity and society. Importantly, this transition is facilitated by a small but extremely powerful section of socio-political and economic elites who stand to gain immensely from globalization and its accompanying processes. The pace of globalization is so rapid that most of the actors, institutions and systems of our political and social landscape have become mute spectators of this transition. This uncritical and often tacit approval of globalization and the neo-liberal framework is creating a political and economic architecture designed to facilitate the cornering of all resources by a very small segment leading to exclusion of the majority of population from growth and development.

Civil society has an extremely rich and vibrant history in India. Starting from the Gandhian movement, civil society has been at the forefront of peoples struggles for rights and justice. It has played the crucial role of promoting people centred development and deepening democracy in the country. Now in the context of globalization and increasing marginalization of the majority of the population, as civil society organizations and social action groups we are confronted with vital and fundamental questions like what should be the civil society's role, engagement and response to globalization. Politically, there is a broad based consensus amongst the social action groups and civil society organizations that it is imperative to resist and oppose globalization and its neo-liberal framework to protect the interests and rights of poor, common and ordinary people.

Nevertheless, given the rapidity of changes there is lack of clarity and strategic direction for building a strong broad based bulwark against the forces of globalization. Some global experiments like the World Social Forum (WSF) have had a deep impact on the civil society space in India and have also helped social action groups in building a more strategic response to globalization. However, there is inadequate information and understanding of the diverse civil society responses to globalization in the country. This book on 'Globalization in India Civil Society Responses' attempts to bridge this information and knowledge gap as it maps the diverse civil society responses to globalization in India from a perspective of people centred advocacy. Hopefully, this mapping exercise with the analytical framework of people centred advocacy would help other social action groups in framing their responses to globalization and strengthen the movement for rights and justice.

In solidarity,

Amitabh Behar



# 1

## Introduction

In January 2004, lakhs of civil society activists in India joined forces with activists from around the world in Mumbai at the first ever World Social Forum in Asia to articulate their vision of ‘another world’, a vision of a world different from the current paradigm offered by the phenomenon of globalization. Armed with banners, slogans, song and dance civil society activists of different hues and beliefs spent over one week discussing and debating the social and economic effects of globalization, the collective failure of developmental paradigms and particularly globalization to address the rights of the poor and marginalized and the need for a better, just, fair world. It marked the first and most visible articulation of Indian civil society activist’s belief that ‘another world is possible’.

The World Social Forum in Mumbai was arguably, one of the most vocal illustrations of an issue that is increasingly becoming a critical concern for civil society activists in India - Globalization or more specifically, the impact of globalization on the poor and marginalized. This paper is an attempt to chart the course of contemporary civil society activism on globalization. It offers an overview and analysis of the nature and form of this activism. The objective is to understand the changing nature of civil society activism in the context of the globalization phenomenon.

Globalization has many elements to it. It is about the integration of societies across national boundaries, the increased flow of information, ideas, norms, values and cultures but most crucially, it is about the integration of world economies or what has come to be termed as ‘economic globalization’. Economic globalization is about the flow of capital, goods, services and labor across national boundaries which in turn have resulted in enhanced foreign investments and capital flows, lowering of tariff barriers and growth in the power of international regulatory bodies. Such is the significance of economic globalization that in popular parlance, globalization has become synonymous economic globalization and in particular with the increasing reach of corporate and financial interests at the global level.

There is little argument that economic globalization has come to dominate the social and political relations in contemporary society. The consequent growth in the role and mandate of International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and the increasing reach of transnational corporate interests have, in significant ways, altered the nature and role of the nation - state. Governance is no longer the traditional monopoly of the nation - state. Rather the nation - state now has to negotiate through a complex of different layers of authority both national and supra national, private and public. Moreover, as is often argued, globalization and its policies - fiscal austerity, privatization and market liberalization have pushed the idea of a minimalist state where the state retreats from its traditional role as regulator and welfare provider to become a facilitator of trade and markets. How has civil society responded to these changes? How does civil society relate to the nation-state in this new context? What are its critical concerns and key strategies? And finally, how does civil society activism serve to empower ordinary citizens and facilitate their participation in governance given its multilayered nature and complexity? There has been some effort to document and analyze these issues at the global level- particularly the global north. However, relatively little is known about the nature, form and tonality of civil society activism on globalization in India. This paper is an effort to address these questions from the perspective of Indian civil society. It does so by examining the following:

- The context of civil society engagement with the debate on globalization
- Strategies for intervention
- The primary issues and concerns for civil society activism on globalization

As a backdrop to this analysis it is important to lay the context within which civil society seeks to engage with globalization. The next two sections of this chapter examine the context of the debate on globalization and locate civil society activism within this.

## SECTION-1

### **CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE GREAT GLOBALIZATION DEBATE:**

There is no doubt that globalization is the most defining feature of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. It affects our everyday lives in the most profound ways and has irrevocably transformed the nature and form of economic, social and political relations across the world. Yet, it remains at the center of one of the most passionate ideological debates to shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century so much so that many theorists suggest that the globalization debate marks the ‘new beginning of history’ in the post cold war world<sup>2</sup>. At its core the debate on globalization is

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Dervis, Kemal and Ozer, Ceren (2005), ‘ A Better Globalization: Legitimacy, Governance and Reform’, Center for Global Development, [www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org)

fundamentally about world views, about ideology and about differing visions of what constitutes a good, just society.

The focus of the debate is almost entirely on economic globalization. For supporters of globalization, liberalization, free trade and market led capitalism together with technological advances offer unprecedented opportunities for economic prosperity. Drawing on the developmental experience of the South East Asian countries and more recently China and India, they argue that it is countries which have successfully entered the global market and participated in globalization that have grown the most in recent human history. Conversely, poverty remains at its highest in countries and regions that remain untouched by globalization most notably Africa. Moreover in absolute terms world poverty has in fact declined since the era of accelerated economic globalization- the percentage of the world poor declined between 1987 and 1998 from about 25 percent to 21 percent and the absolute number from an estimated 1.2 billion to 1.1 billion<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand there are those that strongly oppose globalization and in particular the 'market fundamentalism' of globalization. On this view, globalization while good for the rich, does little to help the poor and in fact is a major culprit in deepening poverty and inequality in the world. Crucially, critiques of globalization are concerned with the role that the instruments of globalization- transnational corporations and international regulatory authorities such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have come to play in tipping the global power balance towards the rich and powerful nations of the world. On this view, these institutions bias and, according to some alarmist positions, seriously undermine the decision making powers of the nation state to ensure the promotion of market based reforms. Moreover, this view holds that globalization has enforced the 'retreat of the state' and brought governance in to the hands of corporate powers and private markets that further their own personal interests at the expense of the poor.

At the risk of oversimplification, there are two layers to the anti-globalization debate. On the one hand there are those that view globalization as necessarily imperialistic and see it as an instrument for western powers to affirm their hegemony. On the other there are those that argue for the potential of globalization but only if managed well. Stiglitz for instance notes that the failure of globalization is a consequence of the current distribution of political power that has shaped its evolution. The problem therefore is not with globalization per se but with the politics that has shaped it. For globalization to work, one needs to shape a new global politics- one that is fairer and politically representative.<sup>4</sup>

At a global level, civil society offers one of the most profound critiques of globalization. It enters the debate by critiquing globalizations asymmetric power relations and the adverse impact this has on the poor. Through years of activism, civil society has

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<sup>3</sup> Stiglitz, Joseph (2006) 'Making Globalization Work', Penguin

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between inequality and globalization see Birdsall, Nancy (2002), 'Asymmetric Globalization: Global Markets Require Good Global Politics', Working Paper #12, [www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org)

emerged as a crucial space for articulating and addressing these concerns.<sup>5</sup> The first major protest against globalization took place in Seattle in 1999 when numerous civil society activists came together to protest against liberalization and open markets. Seattle marked the beginning of a veritable proliferation of civil society activism around the issue. Civil society activists are now present at every important juncture of global governance be it WTO meetings, World Bank and IMF annual general body meetings and inter-regional events- where policies determining the course of globalization are charted out.

Civil society actors have engaged with globalization in several ways. First, they have performed an important role as watchdogs to global governance institutions in particular the World Bank, IMF and WTO. Organizations such as the Bank Information Center partner with civil society organizations to closely monitor the World Bank, the IMF and other regional development banks with the objective of pushing for greater participation, transparency and accountability in their governance and operations. The United Nations (UN) Watch performs a similar function for the United Nations. Second, they have been involved in sustained public awareness and information generation campaigns that have acquired great global significance and helped fuel public debate on the merits and demerits of globalization. An interesting example of this can be found in the work of the Oxfam 'Make Trade Fair' campaign that highlighted the crisis faced by millions of farmers and other commodity producers in the third world consequent to global trade policies on the global stage. In so doing it gave a serious boost to the fair trade campaign and is now one of its most vocal supporters. Third, they have built networks and alliances- most notably the World Social Forum- to articulate concerns and ensure that voices of those adversely affected by globalization are heard. Through these networks, civil society has been instrumental in developing links with civil society actors in the global south and helped bring their struggles to the global platform. Fourth, they have emerged as powerful watch dogs in the corporate sphere. Organizations such as the Transnational Corporations Observatory monitor the operations of TNCs and make public information related to their social and environmental behavior, their financial practices and so on. The global north has also witnessed a number of campaigns such as the Walmart watch and SweatShop Watch that have been working to push for greater transparency and the adoption socially and environmentally sound business practices in large business conglomerates.

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<sup>5</sup> There is one qualification to be made here. The civil society landscape is extremely diverse. It is home to multiple ideologies and institutions. Consequently, although the dominant ideological position in civil society is to anti-globalization, there are a few neo liberal and centrist organizations most notably the Cato institute and the Globalization Institute in the European Union, Belgium that undertake policy research and advocacy to push policies that promote globalization.

### **Box : 1**

#### **A glimpse in to civil society engagement with globalization in the global North**

##### **Bank Information Centre**

Based in Washington DC, the Bank Information Centre (BIC) is one of the most prominent international networks of civil society organizations working to influence the policies of the World Bank and other international financial institutions and in so doing promote social and economic justice. Its mandate is to ‘amplify local voices in democratizing development’. Through its networks with civil society organizations from across the globe, the centre has created a platform for multiple interests and voices to articulate their views and participate and shape World Bank policy and operations. The centre actively advocates for the protection of rights, participation, transparency and public accountability in the governance and operations of the World Bank and other financial institutions. The BIC fulfils its mission through three core strategies. These are: (i) information services and capacity building, (ii) Project and policy monitoring, and (iii) Policy reform. The BIC offers its partners education materials on IFIs including a tool kit on the World Bank and the ADB, hard to access project and policy documents prepared by IFIs, strategic support to monitor and analyse the impact of World Bank operations, and research work and analysis on developments within these institutions and their impact.

##### **SweatShop Watch**

SweatShop Watch is a coalition of organizations and individuals in California that works to promote the interests of low wage workers both within the United States and globally. The focus of its work is on eliminating exploitation in California’s garment industry. Sweatshop watch works at the grassroots level – directly with workers organizations and at the policy level. At the grassroots level, it supports its member organizations through a range of activities including, educating workers on their rights, educating consumers and the media on workers plight, and mobilizing workers through union boycotts, large scale campaigns and street actions. At the policy level, SweatShop Watch advocates with state and federal agencies to push policies that protect workers’ rights. In addition, it has been involved in bringing lawsuits against, and defending lawsuits brought by, retailers, manufacturers, contractors, and government institutions; training judges and labor commissioners to be aware

of sweatshop conditions; and demanding corporate accountability through dialogue with contractors, manufacturers, and retailers, and worker, consumer and shareholder campaigns.

At present, SweatShop Watch is engaged in two projects: (i) Corporate Accountability Campaigns: This project focus' on holding retailers and garment manufacturers accountable for the condition of their workers. Activities include a campaign supporting the cause of Mexican garment workers in a Levis supplier factory-Manufactura Lajat- that are fighting for better working conditions. (ii) Globalization and Economic Justice: Under this project SweatShop watch is involved in conducting research and analysing the impact WTO regulations on the textile and apparel industry across the globe and in particular its effects of garment workers in developing nations.

For many, the impact of these efforts lies in the fact that international organizations have increasingly come to consult and partner with civil society organizations. Since the mid 1990's, almost all major global institutions- the World Bank, the IMF, UN- have institutionalized some kind of mechanism such as civil society desks, to deal with civil society demands. Civil society is now actively involved in trans-governmental processes including the G8, climate change summits and WTO negotiations. Through this engagement civil society has helped raise critical questions on the impact of globalization and the need for a better global politics.

## SECTION-2

### LOCATING ADVOCACY ON GLOBALIZATION WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE IN INDIA

How does civil society in India enter the debate on globalization? How has it shaped its responses to globalization? To answer these questions, it is important to understand the context of civil society's role in Indian polity. There are two key characteristics that have come to determine the nature and form of civic activism in India.

First, civil society offers a crucial space for representation of multiple interest groups- particularly the marginalized and through its activism plays an important role in strengthening the accountability of the Indian state. Following independence, the post-colonial state was entrusted with the primary responsibility of institutionalizing democracy and catalyzing the socio-economic transformation of the country.

Through the first two decades of independence, this role remained unchallenged and civil society, with a few exceptions, worked in tandem with the state. By the 1970's, however, it became increasingly clear that the state had failed in its promise. Its failure lay in its inability to substantively democratize Indian society and secure the socio-economic rights of the marginalized. This sense of disillusionment was further exacerbated by the imposition of the emergency in 1975 that temporarily suspended democracy and fundamental rights in India. These developments gave rise to a strong dissatisfaction with the political sphere as a space that could represent multiple interests and negotiate their demands. It is in this context that civil society emerged as an alternative space for mobilization and activism that challenged the hegemony of the state and pushed it to be more responsive.<sup>6</sup>

Since the late 1970's civil society has emerged as a dominant sphere of collective mobilization. It has been home to some significant forms of collective mobilization including the environment movement, the movement for land rights, the feminist movement, the movement for dalit rights, and the movement against displacement of people. The focus of these movements has been on challenging inequitable power relations and securing the rights of communities that have been traditionally exploited. More recently, the civil society landscape in India has witnessed the proliferation of professional organizations or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that provide services to the poor and marginalized be they micro credit, primary education, drinking water and sanitation. Civil society activism has also begun to focus on social policy issues such as health, education, work, food. Activism on these issues draws on the language of rights and seeks to strengthen the provisions of fundamental rights provided by the constitution.

Second, civil society in India finds its ideological roots in Gandhism, leftist political philosophy (of course the two ideological positions meet only occasionally!) and Ambedkar's philosophy. In its struggles, civil society has drawn heavily on the idiom of mass mobilization and political agitation popularized through the freedom struggle. The Gandhian means of civil disobedience such as mass rallies, protest marches and petitions have come to characterize the nature and form of civil society engagement with the state.

Civil society's response to globalization is deeply embedded in its ideological underpinnings. For the vast majority of civil society actors, globalization is synonymous with the increasing reach and influence of global corporate and financial interests. It is a process that has increased the dependence and vulnerability

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive historical and contextual overview of civil society in contemporary India see Jayal, G. Nirja 'India' in Yamamoto Tadashi eds *Governance and Civil Society in a Global Age* 2001, (Japan, Tokyo)

of the developing world on the Western world the impact of which has fallen disproportionately on the poor. On this view, globalization and its institutions of governance—largely the International Finance Institutions (IFIs): World Bank, IMF, WTO and the Asian Development Bank and Transnational Corporations – have biased nation states policy making in favour of neo-liberal, market reforms and failed to promote the necessary social protection measures to offset the expansion of markets and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Moreover, through their influence, these institutions have seriously undermined the independent decision making and regulatory powers of the nation state. The social and welfare costs of these policies have been particularly harsh on the marginalized and the poor.

Civil society also contests the view that foreign investment promotes economic growth. Advocates of globalization argue that foreign businesses bring with them technical knowhow, finance and markets that can create new employment opportunities in developing countries. Civil society in India challenges this view to argue that global corporations (or TNCs) destroy local competition and home grown businesses and do not offer enough employment to replace these losses. According to some interpretations, TNCs are a form of neo-imperialism- a new *avatar* of western colonisation on the developing world that must be opposed.

Against this background, the focus of civil society's responses to globalization are framed within the perspective of its impact on the poor and marginalized. The most critical issue that it engages with is the nation states ability to respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized in the context of the institutional changes brought about by the forces of globalization. It concerns itself largely with the question of the extent to which the nation state has been captured by interests of global capital. Through its advocacy, it aims to assess, question and challenge the legitimacy of global governance institutions by pressurizing the state to harden its stand against the IFIs and foreign investment. Moreover, civil society actors have constantly tried to push the state to respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized whose vulnerabilities have increased consequent to reform processes.

Given the centrality that economic globalization has acquired in contemporary development paradigms, it is no surprise that it tends to dominate advocacy on globalization. However, there are other important aspects of globalization that have radically altered the nature and form of civil society activism worldwide. No discussion on advocacy and globalization would be complete without addressing this aspect of globalization. An important characteristic of globalization is the growing use of technology in our everyday lives which has resulted in greater flows of information and communication across the world. These technological changes have

allowed activists from around the world to connect, share ideas and knowledge, shape global debates and advocate on issues of global concern. These very links have helped civil society in its struggles against economic globalization - take for example Oxfam's fair trade campaign where thousands of activists from across the globe- including many from India - are networked together through technology to promote the cause of fair trade. Indian civil society has also played a very important role in engaging proactively with civil society globally on human rights, environment and sustainable development issues. For instance, Indian environmental lobbyists are actively working on a global scale with other like-minded groups on the issue of climate change. Another example can be found in the work on the international convention on women (CEDAW) where feminist groups have been working on the international stage to track progress of different government on the implementation of the convention.

There is one important qualification to the above discussion. Although the Indian civil society space is dominated by the leftist and Gandhian ideology, there are a few organizations that take a centrist (and in some cases pro-market) position to globalization and global governance. These organizations work to support the Indian government's efforts to interface with IFIs, in particular the WTO. Although few and far between, these organizations are a source of research and information for the government of India. Their work is aimed at strengthening India's bargaining position in the space of global governance.

# 2

## The nature and form of civil society activism in India

This chapter aims to map out some of the core strategies and themes that have come to characterize civil society activism on globalization. The first section of this chapter offers a sweeping overview to give the reader a sense of the nature and form of civil society activism on this issue. Next, we develop some specific case studies which lay the ground for a more detailed analysis.

### SECTION-1

#### THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The intervention strategies adopted by civil society activists take various forms. Broadly, these can be categorized in to the following:

##### **1. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and research institutes<sup>7</sup> :**

This category refers to the plethora of ‘professional development organizations’ and research institutes that work on different aspects of globalization. These organizations are involved in undertaking action-research on global policies, creating awareness both amongst citizens and government on globalization, advocacy and lobbying activities.

Organizations that fall within this category can be further subdivided in to three distinct categories. The first are organizations such as the National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS), Navdanya and Intercultural resources that have a clear anti-globalization ideological stance. The work undertaken by these organizations is aimed at building knowledge and alliances to strengthen campaigns against globalization. An important role played by these organizations is to support through trainings and information generation smaller, grassroots based organizations and movements working

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note here that a number of these organizations work on multiple issues and global governance work forms one element of their program.

on globalization. Most crucially, they work to try and link local struggles on land, water and displacement with macro politics of globalization. Networking both at the local and global level is also an important area of work for these organizations. Through their work, these organizations help to strengthen the conceptual understandings of local movements and to present the voices of these movements in the global arena.

The second category of organizations does not take a strong ideological position against globalization but works to try and develop an academic understanding of the phenomenon and its impact. An important example is the National Foundation for India's project on globalization and the state. Through research, this project aims to fill a critical gap in current understandings of globalization by interrogating the changing role of the Indian state in the context of globalization. Key research themes include social sector policy, the law and the state, taxation and the provision of basic services. Two other interesting examples are CENTAD and CUTS that undertake research and policy advocacy on the impact of free trade (for details see box 3).

Third, are organizations that take a strong pro-globalization ideological position and undertake research aimed at supporting the government to better negotiate with global governance institutions. Notable amongst organizations in this category is the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) that undertakes research on trade and development. Key research themes include: trade, openness, restructuring and competitiveness, WTO related issues, regional and bilateral trade agreements, financial liberalization and integration and macroeconomic management in an open economy.

## **2. Issue based coalitions and campaigns:**

Based on strategic necessity, a number of NGOs, trade unionists, social movements and other actors that form the galaxy of civil society in India come together from time to time to form networks and coalitions to struggle against globalization. As has already been mentioned, the first and most vocal campaign to understand globalization and search for alternatives to touch the Indian civil society landscape was the World Social Forum in 2004. More recently, one of the most important issues to have catalyzed the formation of networks and coalitions has been the privatization of water supply. The campaign initiated by Parivartan (a Delhi based organization) against a World Bank initiated Delhi Jal Board project and the Mumbai Paani

Network are two important examples. With the increased possibility of the entry of foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail in the country, protests against FDI in retail are emerging as an important point of struggle. FDI watch, a national coalition of NGOs, academics, trade unionists and others has been formed to coordinate the campaign (for details see Box 5). Other significant campaigns on globalization and its institutions of governance include the Indian People's Campaign against the WTO, the India Climate Justice Forum and the Chottanagpur Adivasi Sewa Samiti.

Along with issue based coalitions, the civil society landscape is also dotted with long standing coalitions and networks of organizations working on the theme of 'resisting globalization' more generally. Implicit is the role of IFIs in promoting globalization. Hence challenging the position and policies of the WTO, IMF, World Bank and the ADB are an important part of their struggles. The National Alliance of People's Movements and the Indian Social Action Forum are two important examples of networks that fall in this category.

### **3. Global alliances and networks:**

An important intervention strategy adopted by civil society in India in their struggles on globalization is to network and partner with global civil society organizations. These networks have provided Indian civil society with a platform through which to articulate its voice at a global stage. These networks are also an important means of support both for financial resources as well as mobilizing global support on issues of concern to India. One of the most interesting and successful examples of the role of international networks in advocacy on globalization in India can be found in the Plachimada campaign against coca cola which through the India Resource Centre (in the United States) built up a large lobby of support with activists in the USA.

Other examples of global civil society in India include Oxfam international, in particular its 'Make Fair Trade' campaign and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Focus on the Global South are some prominent examples of organizations in this category. These organizations act largely as technical and financial support bases for local, grassroots NGOs and movements. They undertake research, provide funding, advocate with government, work to develop coalitions. A critical role played by these organizations is to act as a conduit between local movements and global governance institutions. For the most part, international agencies are well networked in to the civil society

space at the global level. They are thus an important link to present local voices in the global civil society space which in turn represents these voices in their campaigns to democratize global governance institutions. For instance, Oxfam's 'Make Trade Fair' campaign has developed a network of over 1,000 grassroots organizations in India. Drawing on this network, Oxfam is able to present the Indian voice in the international arena.

There are still other global alliances and networks of civil society actors that work either directly in India or have representation from members of Indian civil society. These alliances can be further subdivided into regional and global alliances. Prominent examples of these include the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Jubilee South, Food First Information and Action Network and the People's Forum against the ADB. Recently, the Bank Information Centre has taken steps to begin working in India. Understanding the role played by these institutions is important in the current context. As has been discussed an important characteristic of civil society activism on globalization is that it is mediated through the Indian state. There is very little direct engagement with questions of accountability, transparency and legitimacy of global governance institutions. This is the 'missing link' in Indian civil society's engagement with globalization. This link is largely filled through involvement and participation in these global alliances and networks. The assumption is that through participation in these networks, Indian civil society concerns can and do find representation in the global arena. The extent to which this is an effective space is an important question but much beyond the capacity of this paper.

Another interesting example of global alliances working with Indian civil society is the Global Union Federation. The Global Union Federation is an international federation of national and regional trade unions organized in specific industrial and occupational sectors. These federations have regional offices in India that work to strengthen the participation of Indian trade unions in the international arena. They have strong links with global governance institutions including the UN bodies and work to bring local voices to these international platforms. Most importantly, the Global Union Federations represent union voices at WTO negotiations. Through its regional networks it is thus an important platform for the articulation of local trade union concerns with WTO decisions.

### **Box: 2 Public Service International, South Asia**

Public Services International (PSI) is a global union federation comprising over 650 trade unions from around the world and representing more than 20 million public sector workers. PSI is an internationally recognized NGO - for the public sector within the International Labour Organisation and has accreditation with UNESCO, ECOSOC and UNCTAD. PSI also works in association with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). PSI priorities include global campaigns for water, energy and health services. PSI promotes gender equality, worker rights, trade union capacity building, equity and diversity. PSI is also active in trade and development debates.

PSI has regional offices across the globe. The South Asia regional office is based in New Delhi. PSI South Asia has 1.5 million members and through them is actively working to promote alternatives to privatization of basic services in India. PSI South Asia participates regularly in World Bank annual meetings and WTO meetings where it attempts to present the Indian public sector employees positions.

## **SECTION-2**

### **THEMES AND ISSUES OF CONCERN**

There are five key themes or issues that dominate civil society activism on globalization. These are:

**Trade and agriculture:** As has been mentioned, one of the most important characteristics of this current phase of globalization is the increased flow of capital across national borders. This in turn has resulted in less restricted trade and greater economic interdependence between countries. In this context, the terms and conditions of trade in particular trade of agriculture and services, regulated through the WTO are of great significance. For civil society organizations in India, the WTO is a lightning rod of debate and action. Broadly there are three forms of engagement on the issue. First, there are pressure groups such as the Indian Peoples Campaign against the WTO, the Swadeshi Jaagran Manch and Navdanya that actively challenge the Indian states decisions and interactions with the WTO. These groups work to pressurize the state to harden its stance on the WTO and identify alternative 'peasant centric' strategies and agreements for trade and agriculture. The second form of engagement comes through research based organizations such as CUTS and CENTAD that rather than directly challenge or reject the WTO, work to strengthen

the Government of India's negotiation capacity. Moreover, through their work, these organizations try and represent concerns of the poor and marginalized or globalizations 'loser's (as referred to in popular parlance) in government and international fora and in so doing hope to address some of the imbalances caused by globalization. Research, consultation and capacity building are the primary tools used by these organizations to help demystify the issues of trade and development and create a knowledge base on the impact of international trade policy on the ground. Another important example of organizations working to support the Government of India's engagement with the WTO is ICRIER. ICRIER is one of the few policy think tanks in the civil society space comes from a pro-market ideological position. The focus of its research is on strengthening trade, openness and competitiveness of the Indian economy as well as on strengthening the policy tactics and negotiation capabilities of India at the WTO.

The third form of engagement with trade related issues comes from coalitions of trade unions and organizations that support them. An important example is the South Asia Regional Development Institute (SARDI). SARDI works with trade unions across the country to represent their voices and perspectives both to the Indian government and the global institutions on issues related to labour market policy in India. Along with advocacy, SARDI is also involved in undertaking research on the impact of economic reform on employment.

### **Box : 3**

#### **Examples of research and policy think tanks working on trade**

**Center for Trade and Development (Centad):** Centad was set up with Oxfam support with a mandate to 'strengthen the ability of governments and communities to make trade and globalization work for development.' Centad works both with government and civil society to deepen their understandings of international trade through information sharing and policy advice. Centad is also working to create a platform for civil society to share, debate and advocate relevant and emerging issues related to trade and development. Through this platform, Centad hopes to generate meaningful debate and dialogue between the government, civil society and the private sector on the impact of international trade on different constituencies. A critical component of CENTADs work is on 'demystifying trade'. CENTAD has published an information booklet demystifying the WTO. It also publishes a magazine called 'Trading Up' with the same objective. In addition, CENTAD publishes a number of working papers and other research on the subject.

**Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS):** In 1996, CUTs set up CITEE (Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment). CITEE's stated philosophy is 'liberalization yes, but with safety nets'. CITEE has three program areas: WTO issues, regional cooperation and developmental issues and capacity building of civil society organizations. Capacity building of civil society organizations is an important and unique arena of CITEE's work. Since 2005 CITEE has been involved in a project entitled GRANTIE (Grassroots Reach Out and Networking in India on Trade and Economics). GRANTIE's objective is to develop the capacity and understanding of civil society organizations (CSOs) on issues relating to globalization with respect to the WTO, its agreements and their implementation as well as its impact on economic governance in India (including its political and social ramifications).

**Privatization of essential services:** For civil society, the issue of privatization of essential services- water, sanitation, electricity, roads, and education- is a critical area of concern. At the heart of the argument is a concern about the role of the state and its obligation to protect the rights of all its citizens. For many civil society organizations, the move to privatization of services is a direct result of globalization and market led development policies promoted through IFIs. The most successful campaign on privatization of essential services was launched in 2005 by Parivartan against the World Bank's proposed loan to the Delhi Jal Board. This campaign brought the debate on privatization of essential services to the national conscience and stalled the loan negotiation process. Similar campaigns have now been run in Mumbai and Bangalore on the issue. Another prominent campaign against privatization of water was launched by INSAF against an ADB project on water privatization. INSAF has also carried out a campaign against the privatization of electricity. Privatization of health care is another area of concern and organization such as the Jan Swasthya Abhiyaan are leading a campaign to struggle against the trend towards privatization in the health sector.

#### **Box : 4 Manthan Adhyayan Kendra**

Based in Badwani, Madhya Pradesh, the Manthan Adhyayan Kendra is a resource center set up to monitor, research, and analyze water and energy related issues in the context of the growing impact of liberalization, globalization and privatization on the Indian economy. Since its inception, Manthan has developed as a knowledge centre for information on projects to privatize water promoted by the World Bank and ADB. Through research

workshops, seminars and conferences, Manthan has played an important role in supporting civil society's campaign against privatization of essential services. Manthan is currently involved in conducting research on the impact of big dam projects.

**Livelihood rights – land and displacement:** Economic globalization is accompanied by the lifting of controls on private (both foreign and domestic) investment for the purposes. In India this has resulted in an influx of private capital in to rural areas. Through policies such as the promotion of special economic zones- where the state acquires land and hands it over to private parties for industrial purposes- the role of the state has fundamentally altered in to that of a facilitator of this investment. The main issue here is the plight of the farmers, landowners and tribal's for whom land and the natural resources it provides them are their only source of livelihood and from who land is being acquired with almost minimal compensation. Civil society's response has been two fold. First, there are groups such as the anti-globalization committee and the people's movement against SEZ that have been through campaigns and movements that have been lobbying against such state policies through direct protest and mobilization. Second, there are groups that have been working to pressurize the state to address displacement and develop a comprehensive relief and rehabilitation campaign such as the National Alliance of Peoples movements and the National Campaign for Environmental Justice in India as well as advocacy support groups such as the NCAS that are involved in research and coalition building on the issue.

**Foreign direct investment (FDI):** Economic globalization has resulted in the increased flow of foreign investment in India. As discussed, these investments are often encouraged at serious social and environmental costs. Civil society has played an important role both in protesting against state policies that encourage FDI as well as holding transnational corporation accountable. One of the most successful campaigns took place in Palachimada, Kerala where civil society activists, in collaboration with the local Panchayat came together to protest against water contamination cause by a coca cola bottling plant. The campaign was successful in closing the bottling plant in 2004. Another interesting example can be found in the work of FDI watch, a coalition of civil society actors and scholars opposed to FDI in retail- a new and important area of foreign investment in India. The focus of the protest is on the impact that FDI in retail and organized retail will have on the livelihoods of the hawkers and traders in India. FDI watch is the India chapter of a worldwide coalition against organized retail in particular large retailers such as Walmart.

### **Box : 5 FDI-Watch**

FDI watch is the India chapter of an international coalition of community organizations headquartered in the United States called the Association of Community Reform Now (ACORN). The ACORN was formed in 1970 in the United States and has been at the helm of campaigns for better housing, health care and education amongst low income families. It works in over a 100 cities around the world.

The ACORN India FDI watch is a coalition of civil society activists, trade unionists, scholars and other stakeholders opposed to FDI in retail. The coalition is present in three cities- Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore with a national level joint action committee based in Delhi. Its key strategies for advocacy include research, direct protest and lobbying with government officials. The focus of FDI watch's work is on curbing corporate expansion in the retail sector and creating a national policy for retail. The coalition is part of an international coalition working against the corporatization of the retail sector in particular Walmart.

The joint committee has developed a charter of demand for FDI watch. These include:

- Enact strict laws to ban all corporations in retail
- Cancel wholesale cash and carry permission granted to foreign companies and immediately stop the backdoor entry of Walmart
- Formulate a national policy on retail trade, urban street vendors and small manufacturing industries
- Implement the national policy on urban street vendors
- Institute the independent special task force comprising representation of stakeholders to study the socio-economic, environmental and cultural impact of organized retail
- Enact laws against predatory pricing and anti-competitive actions
- Repeal the changes made in the APMC act through the APMC model act

In recent months, FDI watch has been very proactive in organizing mass rallies and protest marches across Delhi to try and push the government to re-think its policies on FDI in retail. The FDI watch joint committee periodically meets with government officials, politicians (including the minister of commerce) and other stakeholders to express their concerns. To better understand the impact of corporate retail on the informal sector, FDI watch is also trying to push the government to undertake objective analysis of the issue. Finally, the FDI watch has been active in trying to push its cause through the media. It organizes regular press conferences to ensure that its perspectives and activities get good media coverage.

**Accountability and transparency in global governance regimes:** One of the most significant consequences of this current phase of globalization is the growing power and influence of international regulatory institutions in particular the World Bank, IMF and WTO. Consequently, an important aspect of the debate on globalization centres on the accountability and legitimacy of these institutions. Globally, there is a growing consensus amongst scholars, policy makers and civil society activists that these institutions suffer from serious accountability deficits. These deficits arise from two structural problems. First, the institutional structures of these institutions are skewed heavily in favour of the economic and political powers of the global north. Consequently, the relatively weaker countries of the south (that are perceived to be and the receiving end of globalization) have fewer spaces for representation and participation compared with their northern counterparts.

The second problem is more systemic and related to the supra-territorial nature of global governance. Scholars argue that international organizations inherently lack the mechanisms required to support either direct electoral or interest group accountability in their operations. In other words, current conceptualizations of democratic participation as developed within the parameters of the territorial nation state –direct elections, institutional representation- are not effective agents of democracy at the supra-territorial level. Thus there is a need both at the conceptual and practical level to understand and develop better and more effective means of participation, transparency and accountability in global governance<sup>8</sup>.

Globally, civil society has emerged as a crucial space that offers significant possibilities for greater citizen participation, consultation, transparency and accountability of global governance. Organizations such as the Bank Information Centre, the UN Watch, and the Asian Development Bank Watch are important examples of civil society activism directly engage with these institutions and work towards making their operations more transparent.

In India, direct engagement with international regulatory institutions or global governance institutions is a relatively new area of activism. As has been mentioned, the role, mandate and ideology of global governance institutions has been a matter of serious concern for civil society. In particular, civil society has been concerned with the relationship between global governance institutions and the nation state- or rather the extent to which these institutions undermine the nation state and influence its decision making capacities. However, thus far, advocacy on global governance

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<sup>8</sup> Moravcsik A, (2004), 'Is There a Democratic Deficit in World Politics? A framework for analysis', *Government and Opposition*, 39, 2 (2004).

has been mediated through the state. Drawing on its traditional role as a watch dog to the state, it has continuously attempted to assess, question and challenge the legitimacy of global governance institutions by pressurizing the state to harden its stand against the IFIs. Moreover, civil society actors have constantly tried to push the state to respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized whose vulnerabilities have increased consequent to reform processes. The emphasis is on ensuring that the needs and demands of all constituencies affected by the policy bias of global governance institutions are represented and addressed by the Indian state. In essence, although the problems that civil society seeks to redress are a consequence of macro, global polity, its responses are local and points of engagement have remained largely territorial.

Of recent, the civil society space has witnessed some changes in this trend. The most significant was the people's tribunal against the World Bank that was held in New Delhi in September 2007. The people's tribunal is a coalition of civil society organizations that have come together to deliberate and assess the role of the World Bank in India's development process. The tribunal marked the first ever systematic effort by civil society organizations to directly hold the World Bank accountable for its work in India.

A second and powerful area of engagement by civil society on the 'accountability deficit' comes from the work being done on the right to information in particular the National Commission for People's Right to Information. Although global governance institutions remain outside the purview of the right to information law, activists working on these issues are increasingly articulating the need for these institutions to reorient their institutional structures to be more accountable and transparent in their operations. The focus of this work is on encouraging proactive disclosure from these institutions and the introduction of principles of accountability and transparency in their everyday operations.

As is evident from this discussion, the civil society space in India is extremely diverse. It is home to multiple kinds of organizations and although it tends to be dominated by a left leaning political ideology, it also houses (a few) centrist and pro-market organizations. At its core, civil society organizations are preoccupied with counteracting the adverse impact of globalization on the poor and marginalized but it comes to this from different vantage points that reflect the particular context and concerns of different organizations and campaigns. Consequently, as this discussion highlights, the issues it addresses and intervention strategies and tactics it adopts vary. For instance, some organizations engage directly with the state through face to face meetings, research and other support based initiatives. Others entirely reject any

direct interaction with the state and employ tactics such as protest rallies and petitions to have their voices heard.

With this overview, this next section focuses on specific case studies of three prominent campaigns that address different aspects of globalization.

### SECTION- 3

#### THE CASE STUDIES

##### **Campaign for the Right to Water - No to 24 x 7**

In 2005, Delhi became the battleground for a campaign by its citizens against the proposed reforms to privatize the city's water supply network. The campaign was spearheaded by a coalition of citizens groups, voluntary organizations, resident's welfare associations, experts and citizens that came together under the banner of the 'right to water campaign'. The campaign was supported by the citizen's front for water democracy, the water workers alliance network and the Pani Morcha. The proposal to privatize Delhi's water supply system was mooted by the Delhi state government and was to be supported by the World Bank through technical and financial assistance. After a year-long battle, the campaign resulted in the Delhi government withdrawing its application for a loan to the World Bank and with that, the privatization process was stalled.

Delhi's water system is managed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) which was constituted through an Act of the Delhi Legislative Assembly on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1998. The Board is responsible for water supply, sewage disposal and collection of revenue for services provided to the city. The DJB is plagued with serious inefficiencies. On average Delhi gets 3.5 hours of water a day. There are large losses amounting to over 40%. Moreover, the quality of water supplied is extremely poor and the average Delhi resident has to spend Rs. 4,000 a year over and above what it pays to the DJB to make up for these inefficiencies.

The move to privatize the city's water supply began in the late 1990's with the objective of providing 24X7 water supply to Delhi. These efforts gained ground in late 2004 when the DJB began preparations to increase tariffs seven to ten fold as the first step towards full scale privatization. This move was met with some resistance from citizen's groups and residents welfare associations. One of the primary concerns of those opposing the privatization process was the lack of information given to citizens and the failure to consult with them before embarking on such large scale reforms. The overarching issue was the ideological question related to the

privatization of essential services. In an effort to better understand this process Parivartan an anticorruption NGO in Delhi- that later went on to spearhead the right to water campaign- filed an application under the Delhi Right to Information Act (RTI) to secure documents related to the plans to privatize.

The documents procured under the RTI added a new twist to the tale- the role of the World Bank in this process. In July 2005, citing documents accessed through the RTI, Parivartan charged the World Bank with questionable interference in the process of hiring consultants- the Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PWC) who undertook a study recommending and suggesting models for privatization. The World Bank's involvement with the DJB began in 1998 when it offered support to the DJB to hire consultants to undertake the preparatory work for privatization. Later, the Delhi Government entered in to negotiations with the World Bank for a 2.5 million dollar loan to take the process further. According to Parivartan, the World Bank intervened in the procurement process on behalf of PWC and ensured that the contract was awarded to them. This despite the fact that PWC failed to clear the evaluation test undertaken by DJB officials.

Consequent to Parivartan's revelations, the campaign against privatization gained serious momentum. The campaign acquired two dimensions to it. First and above all, it was a campaign against the privatization of essential services such as water. It asked two important questions- is water a basic human right? Is privatization the answer to the government's failure to fulfill its welfare responsibilities? Through its advocacy, the campaign raised some serious concerns about the impact of privatization of water on the poor. According to the campaign, under the project, the management of each of Delhi's 21 zones would be handed over to water companies which would collect a management fee amounting to 25 million dollars a year. This money would be recovered through high user fees. The project would also reduce the availability of non revenue water. Consequent to this rise in costs, the campaign estimated that if accepted, the project to privatize Delhi's water supply would result in increasing a typical families water bills by at least five times. In practical terms, this would make water so expensive that poor people's access would be severely affected.

Second, it was a campaign about the complicity of global governance institutions in pushing the globalization agenda and their collective failure to be accountable to citizens of the countries concerned. Drawing on the World Bank's somewhat dubious role in contract procurements under the privatization project, the campaign highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability in the World Bank system. Through its advocacy, it pushed forward the demand that the World Bank

change its global policies to enable public access of information on its operations by citizens of the countries in which it operates. This marked the first time that civil society organizations tried to seriously engage with the structure and method of the World Bank's operations in India. As has been discussed earlier, most civil society activism with global governance institutions has been mediated through the state. By pushing the demand for a serious rethink of the World Bank's institutional structure and questioning the legitimacy and accountability of its operations, the campaign for the right to water marked an important shift in the ways in which civil society could engage with global governance institutions and stressed the importance of direct engagement with these institutions.

Activities for the campaign were conducted under the banner of the Right to water Campaign and spearheaded by Parivartan. The campaign lobbied extensively with government officials- at the central and state level, the World Bank and private parties. The campaign also launched a large scale awareness and public education campaign to mobilize popular support. In addition, regular demonstrations and city wide meetings were organized throughout the year. The media was used extensively to raise public awareness and mobilize support. Regular coverage was accorded to the campaign's activities and many prominent columnists wrote on the issue. This had a very significant impact in sustaining pressure on the government. Demystifying information and making it available to the public was the crux of the campaign. Activists distilled complex documents into simple power point presentations highlighting the issues and the pitfalls of the 24x7 project. These were then shared with citizens in seminar rooms, community hall meetings, resident welfare associations and universities. On October 17, 2005, the campaign organized a jansunwai in Delhi. The jansunwai was attended by a number of prominent activists and experts including Aruna Roy, former Supreme Court judge Justice S. C. Aggarwal and Justice D. P. Wadhwa and Arundhati Roy.

In response to this large scale and sustained popular pressure the Delhi government relented and in November 2005 wrote to the central government withdrawing its loan application to the World Bank. The privatization process has now been stalled.

The success of the campaign does not lie simply in the fact that it stalled the privatization process in Delhi. More important has been its contribution to bringing the discourse on privatization of essential services on to the public domain. This is evidenced by the fact that the campaign has spurred other such movements in different metropolitan cities in India. In Mumbai, the Mumbai Paani network opposed and stalled efforts by the World Bank to privatize water supply. Similar

movements have sprung up in Bangalore and Hyderabad. A second important contribution of the campaign lies in the role it played in creating a platform for a direct interface between civil society activists and the World Bank. As a consequence of the campaign many activists involved in the right to information campaign have begun to think about ways of pushing for greater transparency and a proactive disclosure policy for the World Bank. If successful, this would lead to a radical transformation both in the ways in which civil society in India relate to global governance institutions and the functioning of global governance more generally.

### **Plachimada struggle against coca cola - No water? Drink coke!**

Plachimada, a small village in Palaghat region of Kerala, came alive to claim a space on the global stage in 2002 when it became the epicenter of the first anti-coca cola campaign in India. The campaign led to the shutting down of a \$16 million coke bottling plant in March 2004. The campaign began in response to severe drinking water shortage in the region which was attributed to the presence of a coca-cola bottling plant established in 2000. Within six months of the establishment of the factory, residents started noticing changes in the quantity and quality of the well water. Water levels dropped and turned brackish and milky white.

Incensed by the drop in water levels and deteriorating quality of water, local residents launched what soon became a global struggle against the coca cola bottling plant in 2002. In January 2002, a local NGO the Adivasi Samraksha Sangham launched a symbolic protest against the plant. In April 2002, a massive campaign was launched spearheaded by the Coca Cola Virushi Samara Samiti and the Plachimada solidarity committee- a broad based network of civil society activists and politicians from within Kerala and neighboring Tamil Nadu. The network consisted of members from several people's organizations including the Janakeeya Cheruthunilpu Vedi (JCV) a constituent organization of the All India Peoples Resistance Forum (AIPRF), the Samara Samithi and Adivasi Struggle Committee as well as some political parties such as the CPI (M). The April campaign brought together over 2000 protestors consisting largely of residents of Plachimada who gathered at the factory gates to demonstrate against the bottling plant. For the next two years of the campaign, residents of Plachimada organized a continuous day night vigil outside the factory gates.

Over the next few months, Plachimada witnessed a series of mobilizations where activists mobilized residents of Plachimada and organized several demonstrations, rallies, public meetings and regular picketing outside the factory

gates and hunger strikes to lodge their protests. At every such event local residents largely, Adivasi's belonging to Eravalur and Malusar communities, came in thousands to participate in the protests. The movement soon gained ground with a number of civil society activists from all over India who joined these rallies to express their support and solidarity. These included the Phillip Morris carbon plant, the national Alliance for People's Movements, the National front for Tribal Self rule and the People's union for civil liberties.

On 4 August, 2002, more than 1,000 people, joined by their supporters from around the country, marched 7 kilometers from the affected areas to the Coca Cola factory site in Plachimada. The rally marked the 105th day of the indefinite strike by the villagers protesting Coca Cola's exploitation of village water sources. For the next 105 days, every day, at least 50 villagers from the hamlets adjacent to the Coca Cola factory protested outside the Coca Cola factory in Palghat.

By August 2003, largely as a response to these large scale people's protests, the Perumattur Panchayat (Plachimada falls within this Panchayat) rescinded its license to coca cola. Four days later, a government medical officer declared that the water in drinking wells is unfit for use. The bottling plant was subsequently shut down in March 2004.

Plachimada's campaign against coca cola was further buttressed by international media attention to the problem of pesticides and other forms of contamination in products sold by Coca Cola and Pepsi. In June 2003, Paul Brown a report for the guardian (a well known UK daily) revealed on a BBC radio 4 program results of an investigation that found high levels of heavy metal and other contaminants in coca cola sludge which is passed off as fertilizer by the company. Plachimada residents had been at the receiving end of this scam. Simultaneously, the Delhi based Center for Science and Environment launched a campaign against the presence of pesticides in 12 soft drink products manufactured by Pepsi and Coke. These campaigns evoked a lot of international interest in the issue which helped bring the spot light on to the Plachimada campaign. The anti coca cola people's struggle along with their supporters and partners used the media to further their cause and highlight the suffering of the people of Plachimada. Through the media, they raised awareness about the campaign and sparked the interest and support of a number of activists engaged in similar struggles around the world.

In 2004, India played host to the World Social Forum (WSF) where activists struggling against coca cola were able to connect with activists from all over the world. The WSF provided an international platform for the Plachimada campaign which helped the campaign to draw links and develop networks with civil society

organizations advocating against globalization across the world. The WSF was followed by the World Water Conference held in Plachimada. The conference was organized by the Perumatty Panchayat in collaboration with the campaign and other supporters. Arguably, the very act of holding a global conference at the epicenter of the struggle marked an important shift in the role of global alliances from being mere supporters of local struggles to active participants. As Jose Bove, leader of the 'confederation Paysanne' (a leftist peasant farmers union in France) said in his inaugural speech 'globalise your struggle to globalise your hopes'. During the conference, over 300 prominent activists from around the globe- including Maude Barlow, chairperson of the Canada based Council of Canadian Public Advocacy Organizations, Vandana Shiva, one of India's most famous environmental activists- participated in a Dharna outside the infamous bottling plant.

The campaign also found support from a large international community brought together through the worldwide web. Corpwatch India- which later developed in to the India Resource Center (IRC) - US based non-profit organization – used the internet as a resource to mobilize supporters for the campaign in the US. At the height of the Plachimada campaign, the website saw as many as over 20,000 visitors per day. It is now one of the most comprehensive resources available on the history of the campaign.

Meanwhile, the Perumatty Panchayat is locked in a sea saw battle with the Kerala high court and the Supreme Court on the license matter and subsequent state government orders that attempted to overrule the Panchayat. While the legal battle continues, the Plachimada solidarity committee continues to organize demonstration and protests to further their cause. They also work to support similar campaign across the country. In 2007 on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of the struggle, the campaign called for the formation of a national solidarity committee to include organizations working on people's right to water, organizations to resist TNCs, and organizations advocating against globalization more generally. The bottling plant remains closed.

As is evident from this discussion, the Plachimada campaign adopted two distinct strategies to push its cause. First, it depended on mobilization at the local level. Campaign activists regularly organized rallies, demonstrations, sit ins and hunger strikes where local residents came out in thousands to express their anger and call for the closure of the plant. Through these activities, the campaign was able to directly engage both with the coca-cola company and the state government to pressurize them to respond to people's demands. Second, it drew on global civil society through networks, alliances and the internet to acquire a global lobby of supporters. In this way, what started out as a small local struggle soon became a

global campaign. This is an essential characteristic of civil society activism on globalization and in many ways emerges out of the imperatives of globalization- after all it is because of globalization that local issues now find their roots in macro-global politics and thus require global solutions. Paradoxically, this ‘globalization’ of local struggles is also facilitated by technical advances that are a consequence of globalization. Through globalization, the internet and the global media offer the most powerful tool through which to place local struggles on to the global map.

### **The Independent People’s Tribunal on the World Bank Group in India -**

#### ***Holding the World Bank accountable***

In September 2007, Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University played host to the first ever Independent People’s Tribunal on the World Bank group in India. Over four days and through dozens of panel discussions, more than 600 civil society activists, NGOs, research institutions and academics gathered together to air their grievances against the World Bank. Over 150 depositions were made to a 15 member jury consisting of prominent activists and members of the judiciary such as Aruna Roy, Arundhati Roy, former SC judge PB Sawant and Amit Bahaduri.

The concept of a ‘people’s tribunal’ is not new to India. In 1993, the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN)- a collective of lawyers and social activists that collaborate with civil society to use the legal system to promote human rights and social justice- formed the Independent People’s Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights (IPT). The IPT is a semi-autonomous association that works through People’s Tribunals and Public Hearings to draw attention to human rights violations and issues concerning environmental justice. The IPT investigations are led by retired judges of the High Courts and Supreme Court. Since its formation, the IPT has conducted over 30 tribunals on issues such as police violence, the right to food, and housing rights.

The idea of organizing a people’s tribunal on the World Bank was first put forward in 2005 at the National Consultation on Housing and the Urban poor in Mumbai. The consultation had brought together about 200 civil society groups to discuss housing rights of the poor. During this consultation, many groups argued that policies promoted by the World Bank in particular the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission, were largely responsible for the increasing displacement of the poor and their inability to access housing. This debate highlighted the need for the development of a common platform for civil society organizations to better understand the role of the World Bank in shaping policy as well as understand its

impact. Moreover, it was felt that a process needed to be initiated for civil society organizations to find ways to fight the World Bank and bring forward the demand for its accountability and transparency. Consequently, the consultation concluded with a call for organizing a tribunal on the World Bank.

The stated objective of the tribunal was to evaluate the impact of the World Bank's projects in India, especially from the perspective of its Country Assistance Strategy; its social and environmental standards; and its role in setting regulatory standards for the Indian state.

Specifically, its objectives were:

- 1) To dispel the myth that the World Bank operates independently and does not espouse the cause of any country or private agency.
- 2) To determine the Bank's influence on the policy-making decisions of Indian government officials.
- 3) To determine the impact that World Bank's policies have had on poverty and democratic structures in India.

To fulfill these objectives, the tribunal was focused on addressing the following key questions:

- How do World Bank Policies and other IFIs influence or determine government policies, particularly those affecting the poor?
- Are the World Bank and other IFIs serving the welfare of the Indian people or are they acting to safeguard the interests of other actors such as transnational corporations, the United State government, the governing elite or their own financial interests?
- Why does the World Bank group continue to provoke such extensive criticism in India?
- How and why do the state bureaucracies in India collude with the World Bank?
- How have the World Bank contracts contributed to the indebtedness or bankruptcy of the central government?
- How has the World Bank's role as 'knowledge provider' affected the process and the results of policy making in the country?

To facilitate the tribunal a secretariat was set up in New Delhi and housed in the HRLN. Members of the secretariat included activists from the HRLN, INSAF, Intercultural Resources and Focus on the Global South. The secretariats' primary

task was to co-ordinate all the administrative and logistical support necessary to put the tribunal together including the actual hosting of the tribunal. Crucially, it was involved in conceptualizing and laying out the objectives of the tribunal as well as mobilizing civil society organizations to participate in the tribunal. To this end a number of pre-tribunal meetings were held across the country where members of the secretariat interacted with civil society organizations and motivated them to support the tribunal. The secretariat was also helped by a panel of advisors comprising senior activists, academics, lawyers and scholars from across the country. The advisory panel played a critical role in mobilizing support for the tribunal as well as providing guidance to the secretariat as it conceptualized the nature of the tribunal, undertook research and developed the agenda. The advisory panel was also instrumental in mobilizing the media to cover the event. Finally, all key decisions related to the tribunal were taken in consultation with the advisory panel.

Through its mobilization efforts, the secretariat formed a group of over 50 organizations that came together to act as conveners for the tribunal. The conveners were responsible for further mobilization of participant groups as well as putting together depositions of participant organizations and finally, selecting projects to be profiled. The conveners also participated in all decision making processes around the tribunal. The secretariat provided research support to the conveners in the preparation of the depositions.

The tribunal concluded on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September with a declaration charging the Bank with serious violations of democracy, human rights and sovereignty. In a report on its preliminary findings, the IPT stated that the 'Bank had an undue and disturbingly negative influence in shaping India's national policy's disproportionate to its contribution financial or otherwise.'<sup>9</sup> The IPT argued that this influence on India's policy making was in violation of the World Bank's rules of association, which mandate it to be an apolitical institution. The IPT depositions also highlighted the presence of former Bank officials in senior government positions which is a serious conflict of interest. The secretariat is now in the process documenting the tribunal. This document will be widely disseminated. As a follow up, smaller, state level tribunals will be organized in the course of the next couple of years.

The tribunal is one of the most important illustrations of the changing nature of civil society activism and its responses to globalization. It demonstrated the fact that in the context of globalization, civil society activism has to necessarily acknowledge, understand and assess the impact of global governance institutions on local issues and hold them to account. Responding to globalization necessitates a strategy to

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<sup>9</sup> IPT Press Note, [www.worldbanktribunal.org](http://www.worldbanktribunal.org)

respond to its institutions of governance. The tribunal is an example of one such strategy. In this context, the tribunal marked the first, most systematic effort by civil society to engage directly with the question of the role and impact of the World Bank in India and in so doing hold it accountable. Through its mobilizations, it brought together activists, academics, policy makers and other stakeholders from across the country to come together on a common platform to draw links, network and debate the impact of the World Bank on development policy in India. The challenge now lies in keeping this momentum and translating it in to broader forms of engagement with global governance institutions.

# 3

## **Civil society activism on globalization: A critical analysis**

To analyse the nature and form of civil society activism on globalization in India it is important to view it from the perspective of its relationship to democracy. In a thriving democracy, civil society offers a crucial space for citizen's participation and for articulating demands for accountability from the state. It is in this space, that citizens can come together on a common platform to engage with, monitor and hold the state accountable. Through its advocacy on globalization, civil society has fulfilled this role rather effectively.

One of the most significant contributions of civil society's response to globalization is that it has created a space for dissent. Through its work, civil society in India has come to act as the 'conscience of the country' by constantly articulating the voice of globalizations 'losers' and the impact that market led policy has on them. In so doing, civil society actors have come to play an important role as monitors of global policy and watch dogs for global governance institutions. As has been discussed earlier in this paper, for the most part, civil society in India interrogates the role of globalization at the level of ideology. This has been crucial in fuelling public debate on the merits and demerits of globalization and in so doing has acted as an important check on the role and relationship between globalization and its instrument and the state.

Crucially, civil society has emerged as a space for multiple and varied forms of social mobilization and protest. Its strength lies in its ability to articulate this to the state in different ways be it through direct protest, networking, lobbying or getting a seat on the table. Through its networks and alliances, civil society represents multiple voices and multiple identities. This is one of its most important contributions to the debate on globalization.

Moreover, activism on globalization has brought to civil society new ways of conceptualizing issues and new tools for advocacy, lobbying and protest. First, and arguably a natural outcome of critiquing globalization, the emphasis of activism has

turned to the need for a stronger, more visible nation-state. As has been mentioned, civil society activism on globalization has been preoccupied with pushing the state to harden its stand against IFIs and TNCs. Through its struggles, civil society has opposed the so called roll back of the state and drawing on the idiom of rights, it has been pushing the state to fulfil its obligation of protecting the welfare of its citizens. At a conceptual level, this has put civil society in a peculiar predicament for suddenly its greatest enemy is now its greatest ally. The challenge for civil society now lies in identifying ways in which to meaningfully engage with the state. It could be hypothesized that one consequence of 'bringing the state back in' has been the proliferation of activism around social policy issues. As some scholars have suggested that since the 1990's, the civil society space has been dominated by campaigns aimed at pushing the state to provide essential services- health, education, food, work to the poor. An important focus of these campaigns is on filling the 'accountability gaps' of the state that are largely responsible for its failure to deliver social goods. These campaigns have fostered interesting partnerships between the state and civil society and in so doing mark a paradigm shift in the ways in which we conceptualize civil society<sup>10</sup>.

Second, most of these campaigns have drawn on the information revolution to identify new instruments for advocacy. No doubt, traditional forms of mobilization such as rallies, demonstrations, petitions and hunger strikes remain central to civil society struggles but increasingly, these have been complemented by lobbying through the media, the world wide web and networking with other organizations. Mass mobilization is now only one of a large menu of strategies available to civil society activists. The media and the internet have also provided new ways of mobilizing support at the global level. Consequently, very local struggles, as amply demonstrated by the Plachimada example, have come to acquire global personas. What impact this 'globalization' of local struggles and the ability and interest of civil society campaigns to create and sustain a mass base at the local level is an important question which demands further investigation. Suffice to say here that this is leading to a slow transformation in the very nature and form of civil society activism in India which at one point almost entirely focussed on mobilizing citizens and building a mass base.

There is one central weakness with civil society activism that deserves mention here. As has been discussed, the most critical question that civil society in India grapples with is the extent to which the Indian state has been captured by global capital interests. Civil society's efforts to answer this question have been largely

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance Chandoke, Neera (2007), 'Engaging with Civil Society, The Democratic Perspective', Centre for Civil Society, The London School of Economics.

unsatisfactory and herein lies its greatest weakness. The growing influence of globalization in everyday life has caused civil society organizations to harden their ideological stance. Yet these views are not often supported by objective data. There is almost no serious, objective evaluation and analysis on the role of IFIs in India and the impact of development projects promoted and sponsored by them. Of course, there are many NGOs and think tanks that are producing vast amounts of research on the issue. However, these tend to be localised and reflect the vantage points of these institutions and consequently address very specific aspects of the problem. As a result, most research tends to be diffused and fragmented and presents only a partial view of the problematic. In the absence of well developed research and information, much of the debate in the civil society space remains at the level of rhetoric. The Indian people's tribunal is significant precisely because it represents an effort to systematically and analytically understand and evaluate the impact of the World Bank on India's development. However, here too there was a strong reliance on anecdotal evidence rather than concrete data. Moreover, the effort was heavily biased against the World Bank even before the tribunal began leaving almost no space for any objective analysis.

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## Conclusion

Like most aspects of contemporary social and political life, globalization has had a profound impact on the nature of civil society activism in India. It has challenged civil society to reconceptualise issues, change focus and foster new partnerships. Most crucially, it has changed the nature of the relationship between civil society and the state. In so doing it has changed the ways in which we conceptualize civil society and its role in deepening democracy. Through its response to globalization, civil society has played a critical role in bringing to the discourse the adverse impact of globalization especially on the millions of poor and marginalized that have been left out of the process. The challenge now lies in pushing the debate further and work towards developing an agenda for a new more effective global politics. The imperatives of globalization have ensured that traditional answers to the development paradigm are no longer entirely relevant for they are unable to capture the complexity of contemporary social and political life. It is important therefore to develop spaces for a deeper and meaningful engagement across ideological spectrums to develop a common agenda that pushes for a just global politics. Civil society offers a space to do just this ■

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