

Political work - A voice for the voiceless

The Indian economy has grown at a rate of eight per cent the past few years Nevertheless, more people suffer from hunger and malnutrition today than, let's say, fifty years ago, and not only due to the world wide food crisis. The clash between the splendid India and the underdeveloped India is blatant, shocking and complex. Broederlijk Delen's partner organizations choose to work with Dalits (outcasts) and indigenous peoples (or adivasis), and they want the voice of the voiceless to be heard by the political leaders; Defending the interests of discriminated groups in a complex country like India is not easy. Anyone who wants to influence policy outcomes, is not only confronted with legislation that is inadequately implemented, but also has to deal with complex social relations and prejudice towards outcasts and indigenous peoples.

A DECENT INCOME

The indigenous peoples in Chhattisgarh make their living out of agriculture and the proceeds of forest produce. All these products are officially owned by the state, who largely determines how they are traded and processed. The farmers gathering the fruits sell them to the state. In reality, however, the authorities have contracted out a part of the trade to private entrepreneurs, leading to exploitation and abuse.

Our partner organisation PARDS (Participatory Action for Rural Development) collaborates with the indigenous farmers in order to develop legislation that defends their interests. They not only strive for better legislation, but also for a correct implementation of existing legislation. This is often impeded by an intransparent bureaucracy and politicians' interests. The groups PARDS collaborates with, come together to formulate demands, such as a better price for fruits of the forest and getting paid on time. To stand their ground more firmly, they found cooperatives. This requires a lot of training, but also inspection and mutual understanding. National policy dictates that exploitation of lumber is primordial to gathering forest fruits. Due to logging the forest is destroyed and the harvesting areas of the indigenous peoples disappear. They want a radical change in this policy: the forests have to be maintained as a permanent source of fruits and exploitation of lumber should only come in second place. In addition, PARDS wants the national government to stimulate small-scale family industry of forest produce. Processed products will bring in profit for the farmers' groups, increasing their income substantially.

INVISIBLE WORK

A lot of young girls and women migrate from the countryside to the cities. Sometimes out of their own free will because they want to escape the abject living circumstances. But often forced, for example, because they have to pay off a debt. A lot of these children and women are employed as domestic workers. They are responsible for housekeeping and childcare for the better off families, and work day and night. This sort of work is a form of slavery, as these domestic workers have no rights, only duties.



***'The existing legislation
should be applied
correctly'***

The National Domestic Worker's Movement (NDWM), a Broederlijk Delen's partner organisation for many years, supports these servant girls. They unite them in gatherings and provide trainings for them, moreover, they also strive for legislation recognising domestic work as labour. This means decent minimum wages, holiday entitlement and normal working hours, but first and foremost the right to dignity, because domestic workers are looked down upon by Indian society. The NDWM has two million members and defends about 90 million domestic workers. These numbers are politically significant, nevertheless, a lot remains to be done before this dignity is transformed into policy and legislation.

CAMPAIGN DECENT WORK

The Flemish north-south organizations collaborate regarding the United Nations' Millennium Goals. They want to remind governments of the fact that they have promised to half the number of people living in poverty by 2015. The right to decent work, is not incorporated as such in the Millennium Goals, but is nevertheless crucial to abolish poverty. Broederlijk Delen fully supports the demands made in the campaign 'decent work' by the north-south organizations. This campaign wants to promote all men's right to a dignified income derived from decent work. Everybody's right to decent work, should be a central theme of international policy. This can be done by integrating Belgium's policy with the policy of international organisations, and by linking development aid to this goal. Finally, private actors should also be subjected to legislation. Commercial interests and investment policy must be secondary to social norms, and these should be binding for companies and their branches.

Further information on the political work of our partners in India and on the campaign 'Decent work' are to be found in the Background File. This file will be available at the start of the campaign.