

# March for Justice in India: One year after. What's next?



Jan Satyagraha March, October 2012, credit Gogo Basic / Ekta Parishad

## Report

**Workshop organised by Ekta Europe and Ekta Parishad**

**At the World Council of Churches (WCC), Geneva, 6th December 2013**

### Introduction

From the 2nd to the 11th of October 2012 around 70'000 adivasis, landless poor and small farmers marched with the claim to basic land rights, shelter land and access to livelihood resources. On the October 11<sup>th</sup>, these claims were acknowledged by the national Minister for Rural development, Jairam Ramesh, who signed a [ten points agreement](#). In the last 14 Month 70 % of the agreement have been implemented by the national task force on land-reform, which was constituted after the march. But the two major points, the homestead bill in the Rajya Sabha (Upper house) and the land-reform-policy in the cabinet are still waiting for introduction. On the other hand it is still unpredictable, if the struggle for a national land reform will actually reach the Indian states, which are responsible for land rights policies. Whether, in spite of an urgent letter by Jairam Ramesh to Chief Ministers in different states , they will be willing to implement a possible upcoming national land rights-bill and how and if these bills will finally be for the betterment of the landless people in India, is still uncertain. Under these circumstances and because 1.2 million landless poor got land since the Janadesh of 2007, Ekta Parishad decided in spring 2013 to focus their actions on the one hand again on the grassroots level in India, which is expressed in the slogan «back to the villages». On the other hand, Ekta Parishad (EP) and its partner-organisations decided to intensify the links between different land rights struggles around the world. This takes place under the so called [International Initiative \(I-I\)](#). The goal of I-I is to transform the large and often violent numbers of land related conflicts all over the world into non-violent struggles, as Rajagopal said at the beginning of the meeting. One of the next important tasks of EP in India will be the general elections in spring of 2014. EP goes into the campaign with the slogan «No land, no vote» which is intended to put pressure on the leading national parties such as the BJP and the Congress, to ensure that land reform will be at the heart of the campaign.

## **Intervention from Olivier de Schutter, Special rapporteur to the UN on the Right to Food, and discussions (via Skype)**

Olivier de Schutter introduced the workshop day by giving a general overview of the land issues and the related food security concerns at a global level. He also reviewed the institutional tools available to struggle for these rights. His first assessment was based on the fact that peasants are significantly marginalised by the countries' development choices. In that sense he committed to write to the Indian government to encourage the policy makers to implement the agreement signed after Jan Satyagraha. He mentioned that the [ESCR convention](#) could be interpreted in the sense of the right to land. He also encouraged the social movements, like EP, to sharpen their knowledge of the [Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure](#), as they have a role to play in the implementation of these guidelines on the ground. The governments cannot sign a document like this one in Rome and not put it in practice when they come home : the responsibility of the social movements is also to make the governments accountable. These VGLT also have a double significance : they move away from single solutions by insisting on the community right to land, and they also are more legitimate as they were developed with input from NGOs and civil society members.

The [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](#), launched in 2012, was presented as quite tricky, as it could be seen as another opportunity for G8 countries to expand their markets, in a top-down process. This is another challenge for the social movements, which have to turn this back with a bottom-up approach. Olivier de Schutter also insisted on the fact that the [Declaration on peasant's rights](#), presented by Via Campesina and discussed now at the UN, has to be supported by other social movements.

He concluded by saying that some new goals should appear in the post 2015 development goals of the UN:

governance accountability mechanisms

growing inequalities

food security including right to access to productive resources for self-sufficiency



The participants of the workshop listening to Olivier de Schutter.  
Credit MB / Ekta Europe



Ransingh Parmar presenting the new strategies of Ekta Parishad to the audience.

Credit MB / Ekta Europe

## **Presentation of the present situation of EP in India by Ransingh Parmar and Rajagopal**

Ransingh Parmar (working president of Ekta Parishad) started by making an exhaustive and detailed presentation of the situation and strategy of EP since Jan Satyagraha. The details of his ppt presentation is available attached to this document.

Before the workshop-groups started to meet, Rajagopal drafted also a broad agenda of the movement for the upcoming years, which he called «the road to 2020». After the election campaign this year, EP will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015, for 2016 a workshop in India will be scheduled, which will focus on the fight against women's marginalisation and their role in society. It will take place in ten states and will be supported also by experts from Europe. 2017 will be the year of exploring possibilities of sustainable rural economy, and in 2020 the next big action of Ekta Parishad in India will take place. General tasks for the upcoming years will be the Exploration of peace in South Asia over the [SAPA-Network \(South Asian Peace Alliance\)](#), and the implementation of new institutional forms for the movement, such as the one of a trade union (for negotiations with the government), as an NGO ( e.g. in the case of natural disaster), or as a social movement (for grassroots mobilisation actions).

### **The workshops**

The aim of the workshop in Geneva at the WCC on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2013 was to gather representatives of Ekta Parishad from India, from the Ekta Europe Network but also other supporters of Ekta Parishad and land rights issues around the world, with the aim of defining the best ways of supporting Ekta Parishad in their upcoming struggles. Forty people represented different groups from ten countries. Among the participating groups were: Action Aid International, Mercy Home (Belgium), Ekta Belgium, Ekta Europe, MAN (France), Peoples solidaires (France), Gandhi International (France), Solidarité (France), Freunde von Ekta Parishad (Germany), Ekta Parishad (India), CSRC Nepal, ICV Volunteers (Switzerland), The Meal (Switzerland), CESCO (Switzerland), Ekta Geneva Support Group (Switzerland), FIAN (Switzerland), International Alliance for Women (Switzerland), AVI (UK), Christian Aid (UK/Ireland), and representatives from Spain and Colombia, as well as former and actual volunteers of Ekta Parishad and Ekta Europe (cf attached participants list). The participants were divided into four working groups: “Strengthening the Ekta Europe Network”, “Organising Advocacy/International Networking”, “Enhancing Fundraising”, “Coordinating Communications/Media”. Following is a short overview of the issues the four groups discussed.

#### **1. Strengthening the Ekta Europe Network**

The group started with a short report about a CESCO-organised group trip to Dalit and Adivasi villages in Madhya Pradesh in November 2013. The group focused on the development of small economy projects in the villages, such as an ongoing honey production project and on the empowerment of women through and also inside Ekta Parishad. Support from Ekta Europe (EE) and other organisations for small economy projects in India could be useful for the goal of avoiding middlemen for market access in Europe and elsewhere.

The future of EE on the advocacy level should, as the participants agreed, be based on smaller conferences, on building core groups. One of central tasks of EE should be the communication of the «going back to the villages»-agenda of EP in India. One of the ongoing projects in Europe to promote

this agenda could be «The Meal»-Project, which will widen its activities for the next edition in September. To have a main, clear and precise message for the Meal, which should be provided by EP in India will be crucial for the success of the next event. In the meantime, the Meal depends on the commitment of the people in all the villages and cities where it should take place. It would also be helpful to build a link to I-I. Therefore the plan is to build a system of partnerships between 150 villages and cities around the world.

Then the group discussed the question, how the base of EE could be widened. The wish was formulated to professionalise the coordination of EE, which would mean to secure the financing of the mission of the EE-coordinator (which is currently hold by Marie Bohner) over a longer period. The work of Marie has shown, that activities between EE and EP can be much better coordinated, an EE website be kept up-to-date and EE can gain in visibility. Then it would be crucial for the whole movement to intensify the coordination of actions and activities inside EE, but also between EE and EP. It became obvious, that it is much easier to do advocacy work in the name of EP than of EE. Mainly because of a much clearer general message of EP. General actions and statements in the name of EE need a lot more (sometimes) complicated coordination among the different members of EE. Therefore there was a majority in the workshop group, which sees EE as a loose network also in the future. In the meantime all the small steps on the ground should be seen with a perspective to the agenda 2020. A good opportunity to strengthen the ties between EE and EP are more specified concepts for the European volunteers who spent their time with EP in India. They could provide a deeper sharing of activities, actions, slogans and agendas between EE and EP. A precondition for that would be to define a specific program, a team and a coordinator of the stay for each volunteer before the start on the ground in India.

## **2. Organising Advocacy/International Networking**

The group came to the conclusion, that advocacy work on an international level is a very fertile ground for EE/EP, if EE/EP define some specific advocacy goals and the partners they intend to work with. A stronger support of the advocacy work in India by EP through EE could opens up a new horizon. To improve such collaborations, an agenda has to be mapped out, and define which organisation inside EE can best collaborate with EP. Various international arenas could be played: The academic, the political, the NGO-sphere, economic collaborations... In the short term the group sees an urgent need to target the Indian government in the upcoming campaign for the general elections in spring. A need for more talks on regular basis was expressed.

In the arena of high level international governance processes a global meeting of the [Responsible Agricultural Investments](#) will take place in Rome in May 2014. The committee intends to develop principles. There will also be a national legislation and implementation of the VGLT (see Introduction of Olivier de Schutter). On the level of the UN, many opportunities for advocacy work are coming up: In July 2014, India has to report to the [CEDAW-Committee](#) on the elimination of discrimination against Women. Ekta Parishad could provide an interesting point of view to be included in this CEDAW report on women and the land situation in India. Reports at the [CESCR](#) (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and the [UPR](#) (Universal periodic review) will also take place. In addition there are new special procedures on extreme poverty and human rights, Human rights defenders and Environment

and Human rights. The [HRC- Standard Setting Process](#) will include the issues of Peasants rights and Human rights in business which have been captured by corporations and nutrition and human rights. Capacity building at the national level on these issues is needed. Together with Christian Aid a road map for international advocacy can be built up. It was also suggested during the workshop that a closer connection between Ekta Parishad and Via Campesina could help a lot in the link to other social movements around land rights at the international level, especially with Latin American countries. Several organisations committed to try to help to organise this connection.

### **3. Coordinating Communications and Media**

Ravi Badri from EP India gave a summary of the discussions in this group. He underlined that land is a complicated subject. He proposed three different fields of communication: a) NGOs: Power of the poor and non-violent economics, b) social activists: nonviolence and Gandhi: need new tools, c) farming and ecological groups: Land rights. In general creative brainstorming is needed to deliver the crucial messages to a broad, very diverse public. Very easy messaging is needed. One of the major tasks of communication by EP/EE is the questioning of the omnipresent progress-paradigm, which defines progress mostly in a capitalistic economical sense of growth. In this context, one of the most frequent questions to answer is what EP/EE exactly mean by a non-violent economy. An empirical program has to be built up where people can experience non-violent economy. After Jan Satyagraha a normal decline in the international communication occurred. Currently there are efforts in Europe to educate young people on land issues. A special challenge is that the European middle class is as far away from the reality of the Adivasis as is the Indian middle class. For the people in India it is important to know what each organisation and persons working in Europe need to have in terms of knowledge about EP's work for their specific audience. It is important that both sides can learn from each other and therefore cross also the language barriers. To strengthen this exchange in communication and knowledge, the group makes the proposition to bring up the possibility of a three month stay for Indian EP-activists for a better understanding of the European culture and languages which could lead to a stronger exchange in general.

The question is raised if EP's job is to communicate with all the stakeholders. The group sees here a problem of staff resources. A general communication concept could be helpful. The online media centre of EP, which is mostly built up should be constantly managed by the a person who could filter the provided information. Further more, social media channels could be built up that could actually communicate mostly about what EP is actually doing.

### **4. Fundraising**

One of the major recent changes in the field of fundraising is the fact, that it becomes much more difficult for foreign supporters to deliver funds to Indian organisations, because of new laws. This means, that more money has to be raised in India itself. Primarily, a good narrative and a good story are needed for broader fundraising. Capacity building for traditional leaders has to take place. One fundraising project has to have the goal to raise funds for only one action. The youth in the villages has to be trained in fundraising. EP, EE and I-I have to be prepared for the moment, when the new

government in India comes into charge. In general, it is important to stay with reality and not engage into too much wishful thinking.



Workshop participants, in formal and informal moments. Credit MB / Ekta Europe

### **Conclusions – Feedback on the Day**

The general feeling about the day was very positive. It was mentioned that some major questions for the future have been discussed. At the end of the day a general insight and comment on the event on behalf of our Indian, Nepalese and Colombian friends was asked for by various sides. Shradha Kashyap said, that it was good to see, how much European organisations know about EP and follow and support their work. The contribution of young people are very impressive said Shradha, and that she is convinced that the world will be a better place with no hunger and suffering if more poor people get involved in the movement. Ransingh Parmar pointed out that one of the tasks in the future in India will be to involve more middle class people and to sensitise them to the needs and the struggles of the poor. EE could think about, how it could contribute to that process. Ravi Badri was flattered by the phenomenon how this meeting happened and the manner how people acted together with no hierarchy and almost no money. He saw that as extremely inspiring. Jagat Basnet from Nepal was convinced that European people are very serious about land issues and poverty, which is ignored in his opinion by the politicians in South Asia. Andres Pacheco from Colombia was impressed how everybody was adopting something which is happening elsewhere. He felt a lot of commitment which he experienced as very encouraging.

February 4, 2014 / Dominik Gross, addings Marie Bohner