



VOTEINDIA LAUNCH

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*VOTEINDIA campaign launch
Ramachandra Reddy, Ex. MLA*



*Seminar on Best practices in Service Delivery
of Local Governments*



*Student volunteers receiving certificates at
VOTEINDIA campaign launch*

HYDERABAD

25th January:

A seminar on Best Practices in Service Delivery of Local Governments was conducted in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Foundation and ASCI. The seminar was attended by chairpersons of Municipal Corporations and Municipalities, Commissioners of Municipalities, Civil Society representatives and Government officials. Dr Wolfgang Schuster, Lord Mayor of Stuttgart, and Mr Dirk Gaerte, elected District Commissioner of Sigmaringen, made a presentation on the various aspects of services provision under Stuttgart Municipal Corporation. Seminar participants expressed their views on quite a few aspects that could be emulated from the German experience to improve the service delivery in local Indian municipalities.

26th January:

At the event in FAPCII Hall, Red Hills, Hyderabad, a documentary 'Who loses when India wins' was shown highlighting the various concepts of the VOTEINDIA campaign. Later a meeting of the senior representatives of print and electronic media, jurists,

civil society was held to sensitize the participants on various aspects of the VOTEINDIA campaign and initiate discussion on the same.

There was a broad consensus on the need for change of political culture, and introduction of proportional representation with internal democracy in parties. However there was some divergence on the issue of direct election of chief executive.

VOTEINDIA Campaign was then formally launched at a public meeting at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Hyderabad in the evening. The meeting was very well attended, particularly by a large number of girl students.

These student volunteers and other volunteers who participated in the verification of voter rolls in Sanathnagar constituency were given certificates of appreciation. A cultural program presenting the basic concepts of the VOTEINDIA Campaign, through the locally popular performing art – Gollasuddulu, was also a highlight of the event.

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CHENNAI

26th January:

The launch of the VOTEINDIA campaign, spearheaded in Chennai by the Catalyst Trust, was a stupendous success. Dr. S. Krishnaswamy (Managing Trustee, Catalyst Trust) is one of the core members of the VOTEINDIA Campaign as well as the creator of the VOTEINDIA documentary. Nearly 400 people comprising a mix of distinguished citizens such as Mr. Era Chezhiyan (Former parliamentarian), Dr. M. Anandakrishnan (Director, Madras Institute of Development Studies), and Justice K.P. Sivasubramanian (Former judge, Madras High Court) as well as a large number of college students, participated in the event.

The highlight of the event was the VOTEINDIA Campaign documentary which showcases the culture of malfeasance in the electoral process. Speaking at the event, Dr. M

Anandakrishnan, said that immorality in the electoral process was creating a vicious spiral, which people and politicians were equally responsible for.

Dr. S Krishnaswamy, spoke about the VOTEINDIA Campaign's, Chennai chapter's future plans. With Catalyst Trust leading the Tamil Nadu state activities of the campaign, plans on the anvil include recruiting and engaging students from varied colleges and NGO groups, to spread the word of VOTEINDIA around. The film shall be lent to various colleges and NGO's for viewing. Trained speakers present at the viewing shall then explain the campaign to the viewers and take forward the thought and action process. Led by Mr. R. Desikan, Chairman, Catalyst Trust, comprehensive training camps will also be conducted for individuals who can then disseminate the message of the campaign to all across the state.



State Apex Body Meeting, Akividu, West Godavari

Lok Satta Apex meeting in Akividu

LOK SATTA Apex Body meeting was held at Akividu, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh on 8th and 9th January 2006. The meeting deliberated at length the need to take VOTEINDIA Campaign to the grassroots.

It was decided that the ensuing elections to the Gram Panchayats presented an opportunity to mobilize the youth, women, dalits and backward classes who have stakes in politics and government services. It was decided to launch a state-wide campaign to transform the political culture, and get people

involved in the political process in a creative and responsible way. As part of this programme about 15,000 youth would be given training to understand politics and local governments, and where feasible to contest in local government elections due this year.

However such training would be provided to only those who commit themselves not to entice voters with money or other considerations, and agree to provide a clean administration with the involvement of the people, and focus clearly on all-round development of the village. Such a program is expected to cover about 15,000 persons, but will be expanded to as many people as are willing to participate. During the meeting the committee also took note of the approval given by Ratan Tata Trust for the leadership training program in select pockets as a confirmation of Active Citizens Training.

Meeting with Political Parties

The second round of meetings between Lok Satta supported Federation for Empowerment of Local Governments (FELG) and representatives of the political parties was held on 5th January 2006 to arrive at a consensus on the reorganization of panchayats. While two major political parties viz. Congress and Telugu Desam agreed on the need for reorganization, the representatives of BJP & CPI (M) expressed reservations about the effect reorganization would have on the small villages to be merged with the large ones. Taking into consideration the agreement of the major political parties, and the reservations and concerns expressed by other political parties and interested groups, Lok Satta presented a comprehensive proposal to the Chief Minister. The proposal contained inter alia the following:

- ☆ Reorganization of the panchayats should be taken up on a scientific basis without room for political considerations. It should also take into consideration not only the population but also the distance and local circumstances.

The State Election Commission must be entrusted with the responsibility of reorganization.

- ☆ All habitations must have Gram Sabhas and the ward member representing such habitation should be the chairman of the Gram Sabha. Issues like sanitation, roads and lights should be brought under the purview of Gram Sabhas.
- ☆ Government should provide Rs. 1000 crore package to take care of the basic needs and services, during the reorganization of the panchayats.
- ☆ Government should transfer the 29 functions envisaged by the Constitution to the Panchayati Raj Institutions together with funds and functionaries.

The state budget should contain budgetary provision for each district and 50% of the planned funds should be allocated to local governments.

As a follow up to the above, a Lok Satta team led by Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan met the Chief Minister on the 6th of January. Positively acknowledging the options put forth, the Chief Minister agreed to consult others in the government and arrive at a plan for reorganization soon.

Verification of Voters Lists in Sanathnagar Constituency

At the instance of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Andhra Pradesh, Lok Satta had undertaken verification of electoral rolls of Sanathnagar Constituency. Sanathnagar Constituency consists of 185 polling stations in 174 locations.

Soft copy of the voters' lists in the constituency (as on 1-1-2005) was obtained from the office of the CEO. Field work began on August 05 and was completed in November/December 05. Degree students from various colleges worked enthusiastically as volunteers. Regular Lok Satta volunteers undertook the task of recruiting, training and guiding these student volunteers.

The mother rolls prepared as on 1-1-2003 along with revisions carried out in 2004 and 2005 formed the basis of

the Lok Satta voter verification. Out of the 174,396 voters on the rolls in the 185 polling stations, 153,923 voters were physically verified (88.3%). It was found that 10,082 names needed to be added (6.5%) as their names were missing. Similarly 14,246 (9.2%) names of ineligible persons found place in the rolls and needed deletion from the voters lists. This is a vast improvement over the error margins noted in 1999, in a survey of 27 urban polling stations in 9 districts, when 18,102 voters were verified. Then 4,702 names (26%) needed to be deleted and 3,414 (18.9%) names needed to be added. The 2004 Lok Satta voter verification sample survey uncovered a figure of 12.15% errors in urban areas. Of the 41 urban polling stations comprising 41,042 voters covered, 2,205 (5.37%) additions and 2,782 (6.77%) deletions were made.

Comparative Table of Voter Verification surveys

Details of electoral rolls verified			Deletions Required (Errors of Commission)		Additions Required (Errors of Omission)		Total Errors
Year of survey	No. of Urban Polling Stations	No. of Voters	Total	% of voters	Total	% of voters	% (Additions + Deletions)
1999	27	18,102	4702	26.0	3,414	18.9	44.8
2004	41	41,042	2,782	6.77	2,205	5.37	12.15
2005	185	153,923	14,246	9.2	10,082	6.5	15.7

Though electoral rolls continue to be flawed, this situation has improved over the years thanks to Lok Satta's advocacy and Election Commission's efforts. But even now errors in voter registration are common and are also the most easily remediable of defects in our electoral process. Recent surveys by Janagraha in Bangalore, as part of VOTEINDIA Campaign, reinforce the magnitude of errors in voter enrolment.

The recent decision of the Election Commission to allow post offices to function as a nodal agency for revision of electoral rolls is a positive, citizen-friendly move. But we need a permanent, accessible, citizen-friendly, accountable system of voter registration.

A post office is available in every village, and is widely regarded as a user-friendly public institution. While this process of accessible and verifiable voter registration through the local post office involves simple and easy changes in procedures and rules, it will mark the most significant improvement in our electoral process at no additional cost. Even though a sizeable percentage of the voting population is illiterate, if electoral rolls can be

made accessible (displayed) to citizens at all times for easy inspection in a neighbourhood facility, and are also available for sale at a reasonable price, then much of the problem can be corrected.

This accessible and verifiable voter registration will enable the literate population, civil society groups, voluntary organizations, and local political activists to verify the process and check irregularities. The very openness and accessibility of the voter lists and statutory forms will make a marked difference to electoral registration, and improve the quality of electoral rolls.

While some progress has been made, post offices have not yet become permanent nodal agencies for voter registration. Lok Satta, many civil society organizations, and VOTEINDIA Campaign should focus on this simple goal in the coming months and ensure a permanent, local, accessible registration process through the more than 150,000 post offices in the country. Such a practise is successfully followed in several countries including the United States, Australia and Fiji.

LOKSATTA: GUJARAT CHAPTER

The Gujarat chapter of Lok Satta is currently working on two important projects:

1. Improvement in governance of Urban Health Centers (UHC) in Ahmedabad City

Under the Phase I of the Project, they have completed a survey of about 700 households, most of them from slum/ low income group areas, located in four wards of the city. From the service supply perspective, UHC's located in 8 out of the total 43 wards of the city would be surveyed. This exercise has been undertaken in collaboration with volunteers of SAATH, a prominent NGO of Gujarat, who conducted the demand side survey of households, students of Nirma Management Institute who conducted supply side survey and Lok Satta Gujarat volunteers.

The analysis of the data from both the surveys along with proper understanding of the entire chain of the Central Government scheme of UHC will result in an unbiased report on 'Gaps in Governance of the UHC's'. The Report will also cover recommendations to bridge the Gaps.

Phase 1 is scheduled to be completed by 31 March 2006. Phase II & III of the Project (subject to approval from the Core-Team) will comprise sharing of the Report with concerned Stakeholders, facilitation of formation of local community groups to work out a 'Road Map' to bridge the Gaps, and monitoring & implementation of the Road Map. Sharing experiences of the work accomplished with other wards, NGO's, Ahmedabad Municipal Corp., State Government etc. will also be an integral part of Phase III.

2. Right to Information Act - 2005 - Building Awareness & Capacity to use amongst the Common Citizens

A team at Gujarat is currently working on a strategic plan and allied activities to achieve the project objectives. Some of the activities that have already been completed are

- ❖ An interactive Panel Discussion on RTI was organized last November at AMA.
- ❖ Discussions with the concerned State officials, NGO's such as SEWA & SAATH, and media have been held to explore ways to work together.
- ❖ Gujarat Volunteers attended a seminar on RTI organised by Sardar Patel Institute of Public Administration (SPIPA) and obtained training material in English/Gujarati.
- ❖ One volunteer attended the 'Trainers' Training Program' conducted by YASHADA & Centre for Good Governance at Pune. He is now qualified to train State Government officials and others.
- ❖ SEWA has agreed to work with Lok Satta Gujarat to achieve RTI objectives across their members in the state. To start with, a training session was organised by SEWA for their key members of Mehsana district. Lok Satta volunteers conducted this. The trained members will now train SEWA members in other districts.

LOK SATTA: MAHARASHTRA CHAPTER

The Maharashtra Chapter of Lok Satta has taken up two major initiatives:

- ❖ "VOTE MUMBAI" Campaign - Campaign for Systemic reforms in the Municipal Governance of Mumbai
- ❖ Campaign for Systemic Reform In Public Distribution System

Although Lok Satta had been working on systemic reforms in Mumbai Municipal Governance for quite some time, after the massive flooding and subsequent governance failure of 26 July 2005, the idea gained momentum.

A core group which includes people from the major political parties, NGOs and other concerned citizens was formed to take this campaign forward. After due deliberations, the core group came to the conclusion that the event of 26th July re-confirmed that lacunas existed within the "system" of governance and there was thus an urgent need for rectification or overhaul. The focus then turned to bringing about "systemic reforms" in the Governance so that in future one can hope to prevent a repetition of 26th July, or, in the alternative, minimise the damage caused by such catastrophic events.

The task ahead then lay in carefully examining the basic structure of the management under the BMC Act, and the method and manner of framing, reviewing and modifying the Development Plan. In the process of developing the modalities regarding framing and reviewing of the Development Plan, a scrutiny of acts like the Metropolitan Planning Committee Act [MPC Act], MMRDA Act & the Regional Town Planning Act [MRTP Act] may also be undertaken. Two sub-groups were then formed:

- ❖ Sub-group on Municipal Governance Action Agenda
- ❖ Sub-group on Regional/city/ward Development Plan Action Agenda

After a detailed exercise & series of meetings, currently deliberations are on to finalise the agenda & launch the campaign. Key activities planed for the campaign in the state:

1. Advocacy with :-	2. Mass Communication & Mass mobilization:-
(a) Central - all party political leadership	(a) Documentation - Pamphlets / stickers / Citizen's hand book etc.
(b) State - all party political leadership	(b) A series of TV and News paper ads
(c) State - key MLAs & MLCs	(c) A series of electronic media debates
(d) City & Regional MPs, MLAs	(d) A series of orientation programs for volunteers and supporters
(e) City - all party political leadership	(e) A series of Seminars and workshops
(f) City Corporators	(f) Mass mobilisation
(g) State / City bureaucrats	
(h) Key Citizens	
(i) Media	

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