

# AID Conference 2004

## *Minutes for Session Named Chennaiah*

**Date:** May 30, 2004

**Time From:** 6:30

**To:** 8:00

**Minutes Taken By:** Gayathri

**Number of attendees:** 100

**Audio/Visual Component?** yes

**Speaker/Panelist Names:**

1. Chennaiah

**What they are speaking about:**

Land rights and people's movements

### **Main Presentation:**

Chennaiah started the presentation by asking : How many of us belong to India ? How many of us belong to Bharat ?

“Bharat is India for the poor and India is India of the rich. There is a ever-widening gap between rich and poor is widening. No rich people live in rural area. “

“What is Bharat society? Where are they ? How do they situate with regards to globalization.”

“Every power says “There is no life in rural areas. Go to the city”. But 68% of the people live in rural areas. 30% of national income is drawn from agriculture. 77% of total labor force in India is agricultural workers.”

“Last year 3727 farmers committed suicide. Politicians hand-wave the problem saying “Its their psychological problem” or “They are not able to digest their food and hence commit suicide”. The govt. never comes forward to assume responsibility.”

“Why does the govt. categorize workers as agricultural workers, marginal farmers, and artisans. All these categories are their own creation.”

Impact of globalization - “280 million agricultural workers are getting only 70 days of employment. Less employment leads to low wages and migration. The demand for minimum wages is irrelevant because there is no employment. Technology is penetrating rural areas. This has led to further displacement. Farmers lost control over seeds and production –due to seed patents and terminator seeds. Contract farming for MNC's led to displacement of sharecroppers.”

“Govt. are working as puppets in order for the companies to have their establishments. There is competition between different CM' s for attracting industries. The chief minister of Andra Pradesh offered free land to MNCs. MNCs acquire large chunks of agricultural land. Small and marginal farmers are forced to sell their lands against the barbed wire fencing of MNCs. They are unable to repay their loans and they commit suicide. There is a continuous conversion of food growing zones to export agriculture.”

“What are the types of land in rural areas?”

1. “60% of cultivable land belong to the govt. Govt has taken the land to zamindars and paid 670 crores in 1950 to get all the land. So that land is treated as govt. land. Land was acquired by abolition of estates act. Govt brought out a rule saying “everybody with less than 5 acres of land can use govt. land for cultivation”. By 1960, 60% that was supposed to come to rural poor have been given away to people with people who have connection with govt officials etc.”
2. “Land has been categorized as waste land/ fallow land/grazing land/CPRs.”
3. Some land hasn't been included while measuring land. They are unassessed land.
4. There is some land owned by Revenue reserve/forest reserve dept of govt.
5. There is also the cultural waste land.
6. 28% of the land is labeled as private land – Raitwari land and temple land
7. 12% of land is reserved as public purposes

The above doesn't include forest land and tribal land

“What happened to land reforms?”

“In 1948, govt. passed equal wages act. We haven't got equal wages even now. In 1960, govt. passed land reforms act. But has as yet failed to implement it.”

“1.67% of cultivable land is distributed in India – compare with other asian countries: Japan 33%, china 43%. No party has political will to implement the land reform laws.”

Available legal spaces : The law and re-distribute it says very strictly that land has to be distributed to people. But the laws have never been implemented.

Govt. has failed on land conservation and distribution. 40% of the land is with rich - 8425 farmers own one million acres. APVVU working to claim the lands

Chennaiah recounted an anecdote : APVVU made an Andra MP say “Benami trees are for the poor”. APVVU had already done the land assessment of the MP's owned land and by the time MP realized what happened, they harvested the tamarind fruits from all his tamarind trees. ☺

APVVU has till now appropriated and distributed 150,000 acres of Govt. land. 146,840 acres of Forest land has been claimed for.

APVVU ask villagers which land belong to whom. Then when APVVU goes through the records, they come to know much land is legally occupied and how much is illegally occupied. Govt. of course doesn't release documents – so APVVU has conducts studies to determine land ownership

He ended the talk by requesting session attendees to sign petitions undertaken by APVVU.

### **Question/Answer Session:**

Question : They way APVVU go about land appropriation - is the right way , why not go to the court ?

Chennaiah : If we wait for court's approval, it takes 10-15-20-25 years for justice. To get attention from govt., APVVU takes over the land. Ultimately, when the judgment comes, it is that if someone has been cultivating in the land for 3 years, they have ownership rights on the land. 50% of the job is done by land occupation; the other 50% of getting legal papers will always come. APVVU has the support of the district level advocates to help.

APVVU give's applications to govt. But govt. doesn't respond. They then take pad yatra to isolate the landlord by saying that he is taking over the land. APVVU is now trying to bring out the land ownership records of ex-MLAs and ex-MPs.

Kiran : Govt. is forced to take an active role when land is forcibly as appropriated.

Question : In how many cases has the judgement come.

Chennaiah : In 60% of 150,000 acres of land. Other's are in the process. APVVU only takes over land that they are definitely sure they'll be able to win.

Question : Have you faced violence despite your non violence approach?

Chennaiah : Yes, we have been threatened with life. 18 years of land struggle 3 people have died. Landlords understand that they can't survive without the support of the locals. And when there is a huge support for APVVU, they can't do much damage. Today, after all the things that have proceeded through courts, attack is not possible.

Question : When you appropriate the land, who gets the land ?

Chennaiah : Village decides who get the land. Generally, the priority comes to disables women, widowed women, women headed families. Then it comes to small land holding persons.

Question : Are the survey statistics yours or govts ?

Chennaiah : Ministry of employment and rural development and not APVVU's

Question : Is land reforms going to happen in other parts of India ?

Chennaiah : APVVU is not the only org. working on land issues. Vinoba Bhave, during Bhudan, has walked through out the country to raise awareness on land issues and get back land.

Question : Who even among poor sections gets the lands – the lowest caste rungs ?

Chennaiah : Village community is always in caste-wise divisions. We give priority to dalit poors among dalits

Question : Land reforms are implemented in highest way in WB. Do you have plans to implement in other states ?

Answer : Land reforms is implemented in highest way only in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir.

Question : Could you talk about your work to release bonded labourers ?

Answer : Release of bonded labourers has taken place in first 6-7 years. We compile a list of complaints and give the list to district collector and also file a case. This act ensures that bonded labourers' get the land. But just getting the land is not sufficient, sustainable land development is necessary.

Question : Could you talk about land reforms after panchayati raj act?

Pachayati raj act is a big farce without implementation. Pachanyats are there but they have no power. And Panchayat leaders are offshoot of political leaders.

Question : Which districts do you work in?

Rayelseema and Telengana. Majority of land struggles are in the interior areas – Rayelseema and Telengana.

Question : How did you get favorable decisions from the bureaucracy ?

Answer : There are people in bureaucracy who are caught up in the bureaucratic structure and can't help themselves but help others in their struggles. You will find good people everywhere.

Question : Do you also work on water issues ?

Answer : When we say land, it is not just barren and waste land. Water is an issue. There are other groups working on water issues and we work with them. APVVU tries to see community keeps its resources

**Additional Notes/ Observations:**