

AID Conference 2004

Minutes for Session Named People's Movements

Date: 29th May 2004

Time From: 11:15am

To: 12:15pm

Minutes Taken By: Madhulika

Number of attendees: 150

Audio/Visual Component: Powerpoint photo slides

Speaker/Panelist Names:

1. Aravinda
2. Gautam

What they are speaking about:

People's movements in AID context

Presentation by Arvinda:

Title : Vikas Chayihe, Visnash Nahi

Arvinda showed the images of people's movements where forest dwellers of Maharashtra protest their displacement. For us it seems to be a simple point that it is unjust. But it is very difficult to make the people who have the power to see these simple facts. That is where marches and protests play a role.

Who are the people? What are some examples of people's movements? – NBA, AIPSN, BGVS, Bhopal

To understand how movements form we need to look at issues that move us. Which are the issues that moved you? Audience responses: Bhopal, pesticides in food, sweatshop labor, etc. Some questions to ponder about: How do project site visits help ready us to work with people's movements. What is the impact of inequitable development? The economic impact is loss of livelihoods, natural resources and drastic changes in lifestyles. Loss of civic amenities causes a social impact too. Who are the affected people? Why should they be consulted? Affected people should be consulted because they have a better idea of the feasibility and the alternatives. This should happen in the people's own place and language.

Ways movements work:

- A. Holding governments accountable
- B. Constitutional methods, demanding legal rights
- C. Unity across social barriers and inequities
- D. Policy changes
- E. Attitude changes

Arvinda went on to present some successes. A Supreme court sent a judge to the village to hear tribal women speak in their own language. Documents are routinely held back for bribes etc. Arvinda and others were successful in getting the Mandal Revenue Office of Rolugunta to part with documents after presenting with a zero rupee note.

Gautam

People are those who showed politicians that their time is up. When they see their needs are not met, they rise up. We need to understand the history of people's movements. In some cases a set of people are displaced and ruined because of a development project. Examples are Sarvodaya movement, Dalit Panther movement, identity politics like Yadavs and Mayawatis, Sangh parivar movements. A Movement is a connecting of minds, not necessarily bound by a project or organization. You share a collective consciousness, an ideology. Something connects you. Elite are often threatened by some movements.

Now there are other organizations that visit projects, support development work etc. So what is it that differentiates us? Can we keep pace with the people? We are good at generating more theoretical information, but can we spread the word informally – theater, word of mouth etc.?

A thousand flowers have bloomed. Today it is electoral democracy not delivering the goods. Recent election verdict indicates people want change. Can we connect ourselves with the urgings of the people? Can we move beyond discrete movements? We will not shy away from electoral politics. People's movements are the flesh and blood, and issue cells are the bone. People's movements provide the spirit.

Comments from the audience:

Arvinda showed photos of Surabhi, Bilgaon and Srikakulam. There is a natural linkage between Sangharash, Nirman, and Seva. Everyone wants to pass on the best to their children. I want to hear from the chapters about their experience working with people's movements.

Comment from Priyaranjan: Visiting Bihar I saw how people struggle to work for a cause. E.g Palau, you get a very different impression than what you get from the media. They see the difference between life and lifestyle.

Mohan Bhagat: I haven't lived in India for 50 years. But I am a part of the people. No matter where you live, what your life is, you are the people. Each one of us is a human being. We share the same sorrows. What makes AID is that we are a part of a single family.

Participant: I don't feel the "people". I was born here, don't speak an Indian language, never faced an electricity cut-off for example. But I want to be with the people.

Aravinda: We are trying to find ways to support people's movements. Dr. Chelliah is bringing out a magazine to sustain the movement. You can subscribe to the magazine. Need a chapter based initiative. We would like to have 30 chapters contribute 30 dollars a year.

Gautam: Social movements have been studied for some time now. Number of alliances need to be made. A couple of books that talk about the theory of movements are “Long winding road, structural change to structural transformation” and “Dalit assertion and unfinished democratic revolution” etc. It is useful to study and understand the theory.