inequality in India is increasing rapidly and this is uniformly harmful for all Indians. Oxfam India is committed to curbing this inequality. On 24th October, 2013 Oxfam India organized a town hall at the British Council Library, New Delhi to deliberate on the vision of creating an equal opportunity land.

The panelists included eminent people from diverse backgrounds - Kiran Karnik, Chairman, Oxfam India Board; Malvika Rai, President, FICCI Ladies Organisation; Gul Panag, Actor, Activist; Pat McLaughlin, Educational Advisor, British Council India; Amitabh Kundu, Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University; Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels; Paul Divakar, Convener of National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR); Amitabh Kundu, Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Pat McLaughlin, Educational Advisor, British Council India. Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India addressing questions on inequality

RTL - Kiran Karnik, Chairman, Oxfam India Board; Malvika Rai, President, FICCI Ladies Organisation; Gul Panag, Actor, Activist; Pat McLaughlin, Educational Advisor, British Council India; Amitabh Kundu, Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University; Priya Paul, Chairperson, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels; Paul Divakar, Convener of National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India addressing questions on inequality

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OXFAM INDIA’S POLICY PAPER

- Between 1981 and 2000, the income of India’s richest increased by an annual 11.9 per cent. In contrast, the annual increase in real household expenditure for the entire population over the same period was 1.5 per cent.

- Women constitute only 7 per cent of all board members and only 5 per cent of the senior leadership in the 100 top companies listed in the Mumbai stock exchange. While India grew economically in the last 2 decades, women’s participation in the work force went down from 33 per cent to 25 per cent.

- Scheduled Tribe populations experience levels of poverty seen 20 years ago as per the average population; Scheduled Caste people and Muslims lag 10 years behind.

- 54 per cent Indians openly defecate as compared to only 1 per cent in China.

- India’s public spending on healthcare is only 1 per cent and is one of the lowest worldwide as against the 6 per cent recommended by WHO. The life expectancy difference between the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent is 11 years.

- In the mid 90s, the combined wealth of the two billionaires residing in India was less than 1 per cent of GDP. Today, the wealth of its 46 billionaires represents 10 per cent of GDP. The remaining 1.2 billion population represents 90 per cent.

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In a move to involve the general public in conversations around the inequality

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Life in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh was normal in October and people were joyously preparing for the forthcoming festive season. The Indian Meteorological department and the Odisha and Andhra Pradesh state governments were fast moving not only in raising an early warning but also in successfully evacuating over 9,00,000 people in record time. As a result thousands of lives were saved. However survivors continue to face the effects of the disaster.

“Two days before it [Phailin] came, the Government told us to evacuate; this I am sure, saved our lives”

— K. Gopama, a survivor from Podampeta village in Odisha.

Early morning on 11 October, Gopama and her extended family of ten quickly gathered and left for the nearest cyclone shelter, following the instructions of government officials. Feeling frightened and vulnerable, like the other 200-300 people huddled together, they took comfort in the fact that their friends, family and community members were with them.

Around 10 am the following morning, wind speeds and rainfall increased. A long day was spent waiting for the cyclone to make landfall, which was forecast for the evening. Gopama recalls,

“...the strange darkness that shrouded the sky filled us with dread of whether we would come out of this alive?”

The next morning the villagers including Gopama made their way back to their
homes. They were confronted by utter devastation. Their houses had been completely torn apart by the reckless storm.

Though the entire family has survived, Gopama was filled with anguish – “Where will we sleep, what will we eat, and what will we do?” she wondered as she sat in front of what was her kitchen, now just a carcass of its former self.

Cyclone Phailin left a trail of destruction behind:

- Over 8.5 million people in 1450 villages of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh affected
- Over 200,000 houses fully or partially damaged
- Over 300,000 hectares of crops damaged

Oxfam India’s relief team reached Odisha on 14th October. After an initial needs assessment the team began targeting the worst cyclone affected areas in Ganjam and Puri districts.

Support has already been extended to 7000 households in the form of:

- Dry rations
- Non-food items (buckets, soaps, tarpaulin sheets, ground sheets, solar lamps and solar lights)
- Installing of water purification filters
- Training to volunteers on promoting hygiene

The plan is to cover a population of 117,000 in three districts to address food, shelter, health, water and sanitation needs.

Oxarfam India is working with its partner organisations to respond to this crisis. Come forward and support us to resettling lives devastated by this natural disaster.

Oxfam India demands Property Rights for Women

Culturally and socially women have been denied right to land for centuries. Ownership of property is an issue, for both urban and rural women.

Oxfam India campaigns to close the gap between men and women on equal right to property and give women their fair share. In order to answer vital questions around why property rights are important for women in India, a high level panel discussion was organized at the Constitution Club, New Delhi. The panel included the Union Cabinet Minister for Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh and many stalwarts in the field – Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission; Dr. Bina Agarwal, Professor of Development Economics and Environment in the University of Manchester; Kirti Singh, Supreme Court lawyer and women’s rights activist; Dr. Zoya Hassan, Professor, Center for Political Studies; Gregory Rake, India Country Director for the Landesa Rural Development Institute and Peter Ervin Kenmore, Country Head, Food and Agriculture Organization.

Oxfam India released a short film titled, “Give Women their Share” during the event that targeted both rural and urban women.

During the discussion, the Minister highlighted the interventions made by his ministry to ensure property rights for women that include provisions for joint ownership titles for husband and wife, provisions for including women’s names while opening bank accounts.

Zubin Zaman, Humanitarian Programme Manager, Oxfam India states, “An effective cyclone early warning system and evacuation operation carried out by the Governments of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh helped keep the death toll to a minimum. However, hundreds of thousands of people are displaced. The urgent requirements for returning populations include: emergency shelter assistance, food assistance, restoration of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, particularly addressing water source contamination and salinity issues and restoring health services and community restoration interventions in the form of livelihood restoration.”
and forming women’s self-help groups.

The Minister appreciated Oxfam India’s policy paper and said, “I feel Oxfam India’s recommendations that emphasize the growing gender dimension in agriculture, need to be taken into consideration and my ministry will consider these in its programmes and schemes.”

The panel uniformly acknowledged that some of the immediate issues that need to be tackled are the lack of data available on women land-owners, discriminatory property inheritance laws across regions and religions, and patriarchal mindsets. Dr. Syeda Hameed highlighted that the 12th Five-year plan lays the foundation for gender mainstreaming across policies including those in agriculture. She added that civil society needs to hold the government accountable for non-implementation of these plans that have been painstakingly developed over years on the basis of elaborate field research.

Dr. Bina Agarwal spoke about simple, innovative interventions for educating women about land rights. These include mobile vans in rural areas, which can be used to simplify the law for the masses, as well as to providing legal redressal mechanisms so that more women can avail of their rights. She also laid emphasis on the ‘Land Bank’ concept of collective ownership, that will enable land security for women.

The session was moderated by Oxfam India CEO, Nisha Agrawal. In her concluding remarks, she said, “The question of women’s land rights is not new in India. Despite the immense contribution made to agriculture, women in our society are still not recognized as farmers. Land ownership will not only make them more secure but also give them access to various governmental schemes that they as farmers have a right to.”

The event was enriching, and brought focus on women’s land rights, a key issue in the current development landscape of India. This is one step forward in addressing the issue of equality for women. Change however is a long drawn process and includes not only administrative and legal reforms but also bringing about an attitudinal shifts in mindsets of both men and women.

Registrations are open for Oxfam India Trailwalker, Bangalore. For more information log on to: www.trailwalker.oxfamindia.org

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