

‘War on corruption’ - Brainstorming Session

- At Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi - 09.08.2008

List of Participants

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Surendra Srivastava, Lok Satta

Prashant Bhushan, Campaign for Judicial Accountability

Parshuram Ray, Centre for Environment and Food Security

B.P. Mathur, Common Cause

Maj. Gen. J. P. Gupta, Common Cause

Ashok Khosla, Common Cause & Development Alternatives

Vikram Lal, Common Cause

Kamal Kant Jaswal, Common Cause

The important points that emerged from the Brainstorming Session are the following:

- **Need for a coalition:** Most of the participants had a positive feeling in favour of a coalition, network or consortium in the ‘War against Corruption’, but they differed in the plan of action to be adopted. There was an apprehension that such a coalition might eventually become an organisation, as was the case with the Lok Satta movement. It was felt that there were lessons to be drawn from the experience of Lok Satta. There was a clear indication that a lot of work was happening in different pockets on the issue, but the need now is to combine forces to make an impact.
- **Highlighting success stories:** The participants emphasized the need for highlighting instances of transformation of a highly corrupt system into a clean system. The examples cited included Singapore, Taiwan and

Hongkong at the international level, the reform of district/municipal administration in Ahmad Nagar, Surat and Nawanshahar, the self-regulated vendors' market in Sewa Nagar, New Delhi and the Vote Mumbai Campaign. There was a suggestion to hold a special session on success stories in combating corruption and invite a few hand-picked innovators and change agents to share their experiences. These stories could then be documented and disseminated.

- **Areas of Intervention:** There was a detailed discussion on the areas of intervention by the coalition. The areas of focus suggested ranged from police reforms, judicial reforms and municipal reforms to political and electoral reforms. Many of the participants agreed that political reforms in various aspects were of utmost importance.

Other than the above some of the specific areas that were brought up are:

- Code of conduct for civil servants
- Dispensing with the requirement of official sanction to prosecute officers of and above the rank of joint secretary under the Single Directive.
- Budgetary reforms
- Revamp of the procurement system for goods and services.
- Minimizing the influence of organized interests like corporate entities.
- Criminal justice system reforms

The group agreed that further discussions on the issue would be required to get greater clarity on the priority areas for intervention.

Way forward for the coalition

The following were the main suggestions for a way forward for the coalition that emerged from the session.

- **People's Commission against Corruption:** It was suggested that the coalition should establish a People's Commission against Corruption comprising 10-12 distinguished individuals with the mandate to conduct

public hearings on corruption, especially in rural areas, since the rural population has no recourse. It was agreed that the idea could be discussed and refined further.

- **Common Website:** It was felt that it was imperative to set up a common website, which could act as a tool for pooling of information and resources from across the country. The website could help in networking of activists all over the country and enable them to learn about the strategies adopted and the degree of success achieved in individual cases. The focus should be on the coverage of issues on which the build-up of a momentum could conceivably result in the tipping point being reached.
- **Partnering with potential allies within the Government:** It was felt that the coalition should join hands with government institutions mandated to ensure probity in public life, as well as with the known crusaders against corruption within the government system. A meeting could be organized with the Election Commission, Central Vigilance Commission, Public Grievance Redressal Committee, Lok Ayuktas, and a few well chosen bureaucrats with established credentials to share information and experiences and offer the coalition's help in combating corruption.
- **Mass Movement against Corruption:** There was a broad agreement regarding the need to show the strength of numbers, but most of the participants were skeptical about the possibility of launching a mass movement mainly due to the lack of structural capacity. The participants were in favour of expanding the current network of organisations and co-opting more like-minded organisations.
- **Police Reforms:** There was general agreement on the importance of police reforms on which a number of committees and high power commissions have reported over 30 years and on which the Supreme Court has issued specific directives for implementation that have been ignored. Implementation of these police reforms, a state subject, in at least Delhi and the Union Territories could give a lead and provide the "tipping point" for their wider adoption and further reform.

- **Educating Citizens:** It was recognized that an active citizenry that is aware of its rights and duties is the *sine qua non* of a war on corruption. Hence, it was agreed that massive awareness and advocacy campaigns should be launched to educate the citizens who will then be able to make rational decisions and safeguard their interests.

The meeting was concluded with the view that more thought needs to be given to various critical issues that were discussed and probably a bigger group discussion would be required with more organizations on board to get more clarity.