

‘Let Justice Flow: Transforming Lives!’ World Development Appeal 2013

India

Introduction

India is a democracy with one of the largest populations in the world, 1.2 billion people, or more than 100 times the population of Rwanda. And yet a third of India’s citizens, 400 million people, live below the poverty line.

Significant growth in certain sectors of the Indian economy has been widely documented in the Western press, and the growing economic importance of India in world financial markets is increasingly taken for granted. And yet India remains one of the most unequal societies in the world, in which persistent poverty is deeply entrenched and widespread.

The Church of North India, through its Synodical Board of Social Services (SBSS), has been committed to the hard work of creating lasting change in the lives of India’s most marginalised citizens for over 40 years. The SBSS, or development and justice wing of the CNI, has given a special priority to the most vulnerable of India’s people: Dalits, Adivasis, women, and children. The SBSS, through its network of dioceses and congregations, has links with over 3000 congregations and 1.5 million people, creating a wide network of resilience and hope.

Project Details

The Church of North India has initiated a project entitled *Reign in Righteousness and Rule with Justice*, in response to some of the economic and land use policies which have been put in place by the Indian government, and which are having a significant negative impact on the lives of the poor. The CNI identifies itself as a Dalit church, as 85% of its membership is drawn from Dalit and Adivasi communities, and thus the CNI itself is a significant voice speaking on behalf of those who have been most marginalised in Indian society.

Our support for the *Reign in Righteousness* project will enable it to run until July 2015. Monitoring of the project will be a continuous process throughout its duration, and will include regular visits and consultations with participants. Financial reporting and analysis will be on a monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis.

Let Justice Flow!

The project will have six strands:

1. **Church-mission engagement:** At the heart of the project is the CNI's commitment to an energetic and integrated mission agenda, in which congregations are empowered to deepen their understanding of mission to include solidarity with the poor, and the building of a movement for sustainable and just transformation of the society in which they live.
2. **Livelihood and food security:** Agricultural practices encouraged by global markets can be disastrous for poor farmers, leading to despair and suicide. For the poor who need to buy food, price increases dictated by certain market values can also be devastating. The project will help local communities to address issues of hunger, forced migration, and suicide, and to act in cooperation with others in bringing their concerns to government.
3. **Identity and social exclusion:** The promotion of an "Indian" culture which would unite all citizens of this vast nation frequently means that minority and disadvantaged groups experience an erosion of their identity within this wider culture, a culture that once lived more comfortably with pluralism. The result of this loss of identity is further exclusion, as the needs of Dalits, women, and children are hidden from view, and their very existence is threatened. The project will give a constructive voice to these excluded groups, helping them to represent their own concerns in the public square.
4. **Land rights:** India's many cultures and geographical communities identify strongly with the land of their ancestors, and the livelihood it has traditionally provided. When government policies encourage the degradation of the land by treating it only as a source of profit, the viability of a local community is threatened. The construction of dams and even national parks has left large numbers of indigenous people displaced. The project will enable displaced communities to work to ensure that they are treated justly, and that their livelihood is not ruined for the profit of others.
5. **Gender:** The CNI has a long track record of addressing violence against women, their restricted access to education, and their economic marginalisation. An existing Women's Federation will be at the heart of a new movement in which women act together to claim the rights that are theirs in law, but often denied to them, and to build new and sustainable sources of income for themselves. The project will also ensure the dynamic participation of both women and men in all aspects of its work.
6. **Lobbying, advocacy, and networking:** This aspect of the project will build on India's democratic structures, training community organisations and local leaders to increase their participation in local elections. In this way, marginalised communities will be enabled to increase their participation in local democracy, and to represent their own communities in the public sphere.

It is our privilege this year, in cooperation with Christian Aid, to partner with **CNI-SBSS** and to stand in solidarity with the poorest people of India. In keeping with the call to the Church to become a place of transformation, in which the dignity of the most vulnerable is upheld, structures of injustice can be effectively addressed, and communities joyfully reshape their own lives in response to the gospel, we stand with them in proclaiming: **Let Justice Flow!**