

Campaign by NEW and ADR for Lok Sabha 2014

Introduction: Why we need a Nation-wide civil society campaign

The continuing use of money and muscle power in elections has led to deteriorating governance and scams. Who will solve this problem? The Election Commission has limited powers. The political system is perhaps part of the problem and not currently part of the solution. The corporate sector is largely silent.

At the Jaipur National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms in March 2013, the National Election Watch (NEW) network decided to have a coordinated nationwide campaign. ADR and NEW have done several campaigns on voter awareness since 2002 resulting in wide-scale media coverage. This includes English and regional languages, and both print and electronic media. The Internet and mobile technology has also been used to reach out to voters. In this process, NEW has established nationwide credibility for the accuracy of data, its analysis, and its non-partisan approach. The media, public, politicians, political parties, Election Commission, government officials, partner NGOs have acknowledged ADR's work from time to time. We need to build on this foundation for the 2014 elections.

Needless to say, the campaign's major objective is to ensure clean elections, good candidates, higher voter registration and turnout, better elected representatives and finally, a better Government. It is expected that this will lead to good governance as well.

Theme of Campaign

There is a need for a theme for the nationwide campaign. Since it is a civil society campaign, the theme needs to be people centric. It should ideally enthuse people from all sections of society to engage and participate. Through this, we can build pressure for positive change. Governments have changed in various States and in the Centre, but perhaps the desired goal of good governance has not been achieved. In other words, some political parties won, but the people may or may not have won. While the media focuses on who will win, this campaign will focus on "the people should win", which means, the country should get corruption free, good governance.

This theme is "let's reclaim democracy, let's reclaim our country." In Hindi it would be "Voteapne haath me lein, Ab Desh hum vapas lein". Perhaps the words can be changed and need to be translated into other languages as well.

The campaign will have to focus on voter awareness and will be complimented with filing complaints, filing PILs/election petition. Longer term systemic changes will continue but won't be a focus of this campaign.

There are two complementary aspects to the campaign. One is for the middle and upper class voters and the other one is for working class and poor voters. The message for the middle class is that they should register to vote, and also go out and vote. The voting percentage is very low from this section of voters. However, they could lead change if they participate in large numbers. The message for the working class is "My vote is not for sale." This is to check the rampant distribution of money for votes.

Key idea and Concept of Campaign

The alarming rise of money power in elections has been noted by several people and also by the Election Commission. As a result, no matter who wins, those in power are obliged to cater to the needs of big money. If they have themselves spent money as candidates, they focus on getting back several times that

amount. Naturally good governance takes a back seat. It is almost like “Money wins, people lose”. The campaign will therefore also focus on tackling this menace. As more and more people stand up and say we won’t accept this, candidates and political parties will have to change.

While we will use the best communications experts to disseminate the messages, the key concepts are as follows. For the middle and upper class, we need to explain the logic of why they should participate. This can be done using the following sets of ideas:

1. First, the country needs you since things are not in good shape. ADR has enough data, and the media has highlighted enough scams to drive home this point.
2. Second, democracy is too precious to be left only to the political system or the Election Commission. It needs people to engage – else things will get worse
3. Third, by voting in large numbers, the curse of money power used to buy votes can perhaps be tackled. Since middle class votes can’t be purchased, if they vote in large numbers, the outcome can change. Perhaps some candidates will think about why they should spend money to buy votes if it won’t help.
4. Fourth, how they can participate:
 - a. Register your name for voting
 - b. Go out and vote
 - c. If possible contribute a small amount to your favourite candidate(s) or party/parties¹
 - d. Demand a receipt and,
 - e. Later, demand accountability from the candidate or party. In fact this can be done even before the election

For the working class and poorer sections of the people, the message is “My vote is not for sale.” The logic is simple – we get bad government services (water, electricity, education, health, roads -whether rural or slum roads, drainage etc) because those who buy our votes focus on recovering their investments made in the elections. The campaign will therefore focus on explaining the logic of how money is used and misused, and how people suffer as a result. It will say “let us take a vow to not vote for anyone who tries to buy our vote.”

Breadth of campaign

The campaign will use the best available communications experts to develop content. The following sections of society will be targeted:

1. Working class and poorer voters
2. Middle class and upper class voters
3. Politicians, sitting MPs and last time’s candidates
4. Political leaders
5. Corporate leaders
6. Media
7. Civil society organizations

¹Since there is no public funding, where should candidates get money from? Black money and corporate funding is an issue. Most of the funding is clandestine and not done openly. Ideally, the public should fund candidate campaigns through small donations.

However, for all sections, one common set of ideas will be disseminated. ADR and NEW will continue with its strategy of disseminating information to sitting MPs. While its own data is about the financial and criminal records, if possible it will augment it with information on attendance in Parliament, how MPLAD funds were used, questions asked, Bills if any introduced. Several other groups are also putting out information on infrastructure, education, health and other indicators constituency wise. Wherever possible we will coordinate with them.

The major new thrust this time will be on curbing money power. The role of money power needs to be conveyed to all sections clearly. For instance, the former CEC, Dr. Quraishi stated that over Rs.10,000 crores of black money were spent in the UP Assembly elections. The Former CEC, Mr. Gopalaswami has repeatedly written in the print media that elections have become an investment for reaping returns of several hundred percent or more. This dissemination will be based on facts gathered by the campaign.

Apart from the common ideas above, targeted campaigns for each section of society is also required. For the working class and poorer sections the elements of the campaign will include:

1. Focus on regional/vernacular media (print and electronic).
2. Focus on short 30 second to 1 minute clips
3. Use of well-known personalities/celebrities that fit in well with the image of this civil society campaign. This means, those who are not politically aligned and those who are more sober and dignified.

Action Items (suggested):

Phase 1: starting July 28th, 2013

Purpose: To put pressure for cleaner candidates, cleaner elections

Action items (suggested):

- Write to MPS, MLAs from each State giving data and information from analysis. Ask them to change the pattern of giving tickets to candidates
- Write to National and State Level leaders from each State giving same information and same demand.
- Write letters to EC, CEO, Returning officers/Collectors/DMS/Deputy Commissioners, SP of Police, state's eminent people, corporates asking for the same.
- Write to media and High Court/Supreme Court Judges
- Hold Press conferences in each State to kick off the campaign by end August.
- NEW/ADR to put things out over Internet, sms, social media.
- NEW/ADR to hold Press conference.
- NEW/ADR to try and hold talks/ seminars in cities along with State partners

Phase 2: Directly go to the people

Timing: (suggestions welcome)

State partners to share their ideas and experiences on the same. Dr. Balu from Mysore to share his experiences. Other states also welcome. Themes include street plays, mobile vans, local TV, pamphlets, posters – highlighting key messages:

- Look at candidate information before voting
- Don't sell your vote, else you will suffer with bad governance

Action items

To discuss what we need to do. Options for themes/action are:

- Go out and vote
- Don't sell your vote
- Don't vote for people with serious crime charges
- Create people's manifesto
- Budget analysis
- State analysis
- SMS, Social media, internet, Outbound calls
- How much will this cost?
- Create content for 30 second, one minute and longer videos.
- Talk to media heads/write to them
- ADR to try and create content. Volunteers from states also needed to same in local languages