



Overview on South Asia CTM Workshop VANI / INTRAC June 2006

THE CTM workshop in South Asia highlighted the following points:

“Protests and dissent against the injustice in our societies are being silenced and we are absolving States from their duty to address the causes.”

- Legislative frameworks that could have been used to protect the interests of the poor are becoming weakened (with labour laws only benefiting certain classes and not providing compensation or protection to ordinary people). At the same time legislation devised to regulate and monitor people’s activities is becoming tightened and all-encompassing. Such legislation is thus creating an environment where the actions of NGOs and CSOs are becoming more and more suspect.

“No matter how hard we try to be accountable and transparent, the government still tries to harass you.”

- In the Bangladesh context, for example, there have been many attempts by government to harass or restrict NGO activities through enforcement of new draconian laws. Suspension or dissolution of NGOs by governments under the cover of ‘security interests’ is quite common. India laws state that NGOs should not get involved in ‘political’ work and laws controlling international funding, assets and activities are being used against NGOs. Such legislation is typically state-centric, militaristic and undemocratic.

“Globalisation creates its own enemy. It does not need us to create one.”

- With the onset of globalisation and privatisation of community resources, insecurity has been aggravated. As India, for example, has developed to become an integral part of the global economy, it has raised expectations of large segments of the population. As some segments become more ‘developed’ others have lagged behind and been denied their previous access to resources and facilities. As a result, the level of inequality and frustration has risen.

“Anyone who questions the goals of neo-liberalism is perceived as a potential terrorist.”

- In some cases this frustration has given rise to violent resistance, due to the failure of the state to redress ordinary people’s grievances. The Indian state has perceived much of this resistance as ‘terrorism’. The ‘security’ then adopted has been in the context of protecting the aggressive ‘development’ being pursued by the state. The legitimate search for economic and social security by large sections of deprived populations in India was thus converted into an argument for physical security of the nation.
- Similarly, when freedoms (of association, expression, movement, assembly and privacy) fail to be upheld, this may also result in greater insecurity. In

most cases security legislation is being used against those who question globalisation, liberalisation and multinational corporations. Neither do most foreign donors want these areas questioned.

- CSOs rather than political parties have been reminding governments of their responsibilities. The ruling classes are unhappy with such challenges to their authority and adopt techniques to suppress and clamp down on dissent under the guise of the 'security agenda'. One such technique using subcontracting arrangements to make NGOs and CSOs simply another arm of the state. Increasing 'commercialisation' of NGOs for profit-making cannot be justified if we are to serve the poor and marginalised sections of our societies.