

Electoral Reform for Elections to Panchayatiraj institutions need of the Hour
11 th State Conference of Odisha Election Watch held

Bhubaneswar, 22nd July 2015:- “Electoral Reform specially for elections in Panchayatiraj institutions in Odisha is essential for promotion of free and fair election” so that it will further help in improving transparency and accountability of Panchayati Raj Institutions opined by many eminent speakers while addressing the 11th State Conference of Odisha Election Watch the State Chapter of National Election Watch in collaboration with Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) and in association with Association of Democratic Reforms.

the main objective of OEW as said by Mr. Ranjan Kumar Mohanty, Coordinator, OEW PECUC in his introductory address is making people aware on election related information, campaign for voter’s awareness , electoral and political reforms . In the inaugural session. Mrs. Chandana Das, Joint Director-RC In charge, CWS shared that improving transparency, accountability and women in electoral process is the purpose of this conference. While addressing the gathering, Mr. Sanjeev Hota, IAS (Rtd.), former State Election Commissioner focused on various legal provisions in the election process and emphasized on Electoral role as basic foundation for free and fair election. He also highlighted on lack of infrastructure, concurrent audit and social disparities in Gramsabha as few challenges. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Ashok Kumar Das, OAS, Special Secretary, State Election Commissioner stressed on participation in the grass root level democratic system as the basic necessity. Mr. Atul Angik, National Election Watch/ADR shared about the initiation and activities undertaken by ADR to bring electoral reforms to Promote free and fair election. Mr. Amiya Bhusan Tripathy, Former D.G Police, Odisha & Core team Member, OEW, raised issue of qualification and disqualification of 1 lakh public servants and grass root democracy. The inaugural session was presided by Mr. Sahadev Sahu, Former Chief Secretary, Odisha & Core team Member, OEW.

2nd session on “Electoral Reforms for Panchayati Raj Institution” was chaired by Prof. Surya Narayan Mishra, Core team Member, OEW. Speaking on the occasion Mr. Arun Sahu, Minister Panchayat Raj & Law, Government Odisha said political system and societal system should be systematically and strategically integrated to bring transparency. He also highlighted rights and duties of people as voter and also of candidates. Mr. Panchanan Kanungo, Former Finance Minister opined for little republic system, party less democracy, proportional representation, direct voting system, right to recall , functioning of single Election Commission system at Centre . Mr. Ganeswar Behera, representative, Indian National Congress suggested for reunion of panchayats, delimitation by election commission, provision of appeal before EC, removal of Booth Level counting, dissociation of MP/MLAs from Panchayatiraj System by amending Constitution , application of Anti-defection law at Panchayat Raj election as reforms. Mr. Santosh Das, CPI (M) emphasized *on independent* delimitation commission, withdrawal of candidates by voters, power to Panchayat Raj Institutions and documenting compliances and follow up made. Mr. Kharavela Swain, Utkal Bharat focused on indirect Sarapanch Election, right to recall, No Proportional Voting and independent delimitation Commission. Mr. Sajjan Sharma, Bharatiya Janata Party suggested for error free electoral roll. Mr. Narayan Reddy, Communist Party of India focused on political awareness, and right to recall. Mr. Narendra Swain, Biju Janata Dal also participated in the deleberaation.

The Post lunch session was on “Improving transparency and accountability of Panchayat Raj Institutions in Odisha” chaired by Mr. Baikunthanath Panigrahi, Core Team Member, OEW. Speaking on the occasion Dr. Karunakar Patnaik, IAS (Retd), State Director, ISS emphasized on State funding to control election expenditure. Mr. Debendra Prasad Das stressed on involvement of all key stakeholders while preparing district annual Plan and greater public awareness and the new scope for panchayats as per the provisions of 14th Finance Commission recommendation. Mr. Chudamani Seth, Additional Secretary, Rural Development Dept, GoO focused on role of media in highlighting success stories. Mrs. Kabita Manjari Parida, Chairperson Balianata Panchayat Samiti emphasized on strict adherence of existing rules for improving transparency and accountability.

District partners of Odisha Election Watch shared their experience on 2014 elections. Approximately 140 participants from different walks of life including district lead agencies, OEW; Media; Panchayati raj institution functionaries participated in the conference. At last, Mr. K. K. Swain, OEW core team member extended vote of thanks.