Call for Eliminating Corruption
Implementation of Women’s Development Policy Needed

The Government announced the Women’s Development Policy on 8 March with the objective of expediting socio-economic development and progress. This courageous initiative by the government, despite opposition from some quarters, has been acclaimed by the civil society including women and human rights organizations. Equal right for men and women in all spheres of life is a key precondition for national progress. Article 27 of our Constitution guarantees ‘equality of all citizens before law’. But in reality, the women of this country routinely become victims of corruption, discrimination, deprivation and torture.

The government has taken numerous steps at different times for the development of women based on national and international compulsions, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Convention on Child Rights, the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action. The Women’s Development Policy has been declared thrice by the government during the past 12 years. The Policy was declared for the first time on 8 March 1997. It was once again declared in 2004 with basic changes to the previously declared policy. Lastly, this year the present non-party caretaker government declared a Women’s Development Policy on 8 March.

In the 1997 policy, a pledge was made to take measures for ensuring equal rights and creating equal opportunities for women in various areas including education, health, housing, employment generation, poverty alleviation, politics, culture, economy and administration. This policy spoke of equal rights for women in matters of inheritance, property and land ownership as well as formulation of laws to achieve this objective. Although this policy was lauded by various quarters including women organizations, it was not possible to implement it in real life. In the 2004 policy, the theme of equal rights for women was squeezed. Reference to partnership was also deducted. As a consequence of narrowing the scope of women’s empowerment and realization of their rights, various quarters including women rights organizations as well as the civil society rejected this policy. They called for keeping in place the previous women’s development policy.

The new Women’s Development Policy declared on 8 March reflected, by and large, the National Women’s Development Policy of 1997. In addition, it incorporated a number of other issues including maternity leave of 5 months and reservation of one-third seats in the National Parliament for women through direct election. Although many human rights organizations praised the new policy, some quarters opposed it.

In our country, the legal and institutional framework is already discriminatory against women. The legal environment related to inheritance, right to property or custody of children is fundamentally biased against them. Besides, women’s security is often jeopardized because of reasons like family problems, marital separation, etc. On top of this, women are routinely deprived of their fundamental rights and due facilities because of the pervasiveness of corruption. As a consequence, not only are women harmed, the family and the society are also being adversely affected. Therefore, obstruction to any step taken for women’s development is not desirable.

We want women empowerment and the elimination of all prevailing discriminations between males and females. This would, on one hand, expedite socio-economic development of the country, and on the other hand, lead to advancement of half of our population. And there is no alternative to successful implementation of the recently declared Women’s Development Policy if that is to be ensured.

Implementation of the Women’s Development Policy is also required for materialising the clear pledges contained in our Constitution, various national and international laws, policies and action-plans for upholding equal rights and honor of women. Just as the government has to come forward to implement this policy through specific action-plan after overcoming all hurdles, similarly the civil society, women and human rights organizations will also have to be vocal on the issue. The mass media will have to play a strong role for forging public opinion. Instead of keeping it merely within the ambit of a declaration, we demand immediate and specific legal and institutional measures for effective implementation of the Women’s Development Policy 2008.
Members of the 36 Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) of the country have called for building a just, well-governed and democratic Bangladesh. This call was made at the Annual Convention of CCCs 2007-08 held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Agargaon, Dhaka on 9 February. Over 500 CCC members participated in this convention.

The convention was opened with the playing of national anthem and the theme song ‘Wake up people, resist corruption’. It was inaugurated by the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board Professor Muzaffer Ahmad. He said, “People do not want injustice; they will get the courage to protest by working with the CCCs”. The Secretary-General of TIB Trustee Board and Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam spoke on the role of civil society in the anti-corruption movement. He told the CCC members, “You have created history in Bangladesh by raising your voice of protest. We are hopeful that Bangladesh will emerge as a corruption-free country because of your movement”. In his address, member of the TIB Trustee Board Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed said, “We have only started our state-building process. I believe, we shall one day be able to establish a happy and transparent state in this way”. Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman delivered the address of welcome. The Chief Coordinator of the Convention Preparatory Committee Jainal Abedeen Khan also delivered his speech. Other members of the TIB Board of Trustees were also present in this occasion.

The CCC members expressed the hope that there would be a positive transition towards democracy in the country through a free, neutral, participatory and corruption-free election. They urged the government and the Election Commission to take initiative for holding the election on time in accordance with the promised roadmap. The convention also expressed optimism that people would be able to reflect their hopes and aspirations by exercising their right of franchise in a free and fair election. It welcomed the ongoing anti-corruption drive and reform measures of the present caretaker government. An appeal was also made to all relevant quarters including the government, political leaders and the civil society to remain engaged for taking permanent and effective measures against corruption.

The CCC members who came from all over the country said that an accountable and pro-people politics as well as decentralisation of administration were required for giving institutional shape to democracy. They urged the present government to build a local government system devoid of administrative or political influence, frame a Right to Information Law for ensuring people’s access to information, and constitute a Human Rights Commission.

The CCC members who participated in the convention expressed their determination to hate corruption with all their heart and tackle corruption effectively from their respective positions by shunning it in their personal lives. They stated their firm resolve to work together in various initiatives and endeavours for gearing up the social movement against corruption in order to create a balanced and habitable society in the country and put a stop to this vice which has infected various sectors of society and country.

The delegates who participated in this day-long convention shared their experiences on the programmes executed in their respective localities. They made a pledge to further widen and strengthen the anti-corruption social movement at the local levels. A colourful cultural programme was staged by the CCC members in the concluding session of the convention. The audience were highly impressed by the songs, dance and recitations presented during the session.
The members of the Youth Engagement and Support (YES) Groups formed in the 36 Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) have called for eradicating all types of corruption from educational institutions. This call was made at the Annual YES Convention 2007-08 held on 10 February at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, Agargaon, Dhaka. Around 1300 members of the YES Groups participated in the convention.

The YES members urged all concerned including the government, teachers community and the students to take effective measures with the aim of eliminating corruption from educational institutions as these were centres for practising human values. These should be built up as examples of integrity and morality, they opined. They requested the government to include anti-corruption essays in all text-books. At the same time, they urged the government to raise budgetary allocation by attaching highest priority to education, ensure its balanced distribution and construct necessary infrastructure.

The ACC Chairman Lt. General (Retd.) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury inaugurated the convention. He said that the role of youth has been a notable aspect in the history of Bangladesh. The Language Movement of 1952 and the Liberation War of 1971 bear testimony to that. The YES members are the torch-bearers of this tradition. The ACC Chairman called upon the country's youths to play a more active and effective role in the anti-corruption movement. Eminent educationist and writer Professor Muhammad Zafar Iqbal spoke on the role of youth in the anti-corruption movement. He expressed optimism that the new generation of the country would give us the gift of such a Bangladesh where there would be no corruption. Former Adviser of the caretaker government and TIB Trustee Advocate Sultana Kamal also spoke on the occasion. The address of welcome was delivered by the Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. The Chief Coordinator of the Convention Preparatory Committee Jainal Abedeen Khan delivered an address of felicitation. The YES members from Rajshahi and Chittagong Ifita Wahab Taki and Tabassum Mokhduma gave the vote of thanks.

YES working paper was presented by Shabnam Huque of Kushtia, Zobayed of Rajshahi, Shila of Madhupur, Debasis Das Gupta of Sreemangal, Shahjalal Sujon of Madaripur, Keya of Nalitabari, Afsana Sharmin Mitu of Satkhira and Soniya Akter of Natore. In the working paper titled ‘The Invincible Youth Shall Surely Resist Corruption’, the YES members mentioned about notable improvements taking place in the health centres, educational and local government institutions of the CCC areas because of their initiatives and programmes over the past one year. The declaration of the convention was prepared based on the proposals presented and discussions held during the day. The declaration was read out by the YES members of Rajshahi and Pirojpur Sabiha Sultana Sheta and Hriday Ranjan Halder. The YES members said in the declaration: We hate corruption from the core of our hearts. They made a pledge to desist from indulging in corruption, fight corruption effectively from their respective positions and work together in various anti-corruption initiatives and efforts.

The anti-corruption youth, who gathered from all over the country, welcomed the legal and reform initiatives taken by the present government. They said, “We urge all parties including the present government, political leaders and the civil society to take permanent and effective measures against corruption in order to create an enlightened future for the youth. We draw the attention of all concerned including the government to ensure necessary environment and generate employment opportunities so that we can grow up as able sons of this country”.

The YES members demanded to the government to enact the promised Right to Information Law, establish Human Rights Commission and make them effective. They also urged the government and the Election Commission to take steps for holding election in accordance with the roadmap. The YES members shared their experiences and programmes in respective areas during this daylong convention. Based on this, they pledged to expand and further strengthen the social movement against corruption at the local level. A captivating cultural programme presented by the YES members commenced at noon. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the songs, acting, dance and recitations rendered during the session. Participated by 36 YES groups, the colourful programme continued till night.

▲ Participants in the Annual YES Convention 2007-08
March is the International Women’s Day. The centenary of this day was observed globally this year. An anti-corruption concert with the slogan ‘Stand up – for Women’s Rights’ was jointly organised by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and TIB on the occasion. Around 30 thousand youth who were captivated by the music also became aware about their responsibilities. Eminent personalities expressed their solidarity with this initiative. The Gulshan Youth Club ground resonated with the slogan ‘Stand up – for Women’s Rights’.

The spectators started to arrive in groups at the Gulshan Youth Club ground from 12 noon on the day by ignoring the intense heat of sun. A festival of youth commenced with songs and music stressing ‘No to Corruption’ and pledging to become vocal on the issue of women’s rights. At 2 pm, the melodious voice of popular folk singer Kangalini Sufia rang out with the song, “Showing red-eyes to working women must stop”. After that, those who arrived on the stage one by one to inspire the youth included Azam Khan, Fahmida Nabi, Souls, Renaissance, Maksud & Dhaka, Dalchnut, Arthoheen, Black, Shahed, Yaatri, Kafil, Mehreen, Sumon, Krishnakali and other artistes and groups. Besides, the band Awaz comprising of garment workers and the Acid Survivors’ Foundation also impressed all with their presentations.

The concert was inaugurated by the Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. He said, “it is the women who are the most harmed by corruption. TIB believes that the movement for women’s rights and the anti-corruption movement are bound by the same cord. The anti-corruption movement has to be carried forward through establishment of women’s rights.” After this opening speech, the sound of guitar-plucking reverberated through the 100 thousand watt sound system. With this, the melody of joy rang out in the minds of the audience. Following announcements by presenters Simi and Aditya Kabir, all the singers came to the stage one by one and performed their songs after making calls for taking stand against corruption. The concert ground was then full to the brim. The whole surrounding was agog with the clapping and joyous outbursts of youth. Kafil, Mehreen, Shahed and Yaatri came on the stage one by one. When Azam Khan sang the song ‘In that slum beside the railway’, the euphoria of youth became an overflowing tide. Later, a laser-show and choreography of the TIB theme song ‘Jago Manush’ was staged.

As the daylight faded, the stage was dancing with the dazzling illumination. They presented their popular and patriotic songs against corruption and irregularities – one by one. The concert was a hit by being a combination of rock, hard rock, fusion and folk songs. In between songs stepped forward Chairman of the TIB Trustee Board Professor Muzaffer Ahmad. He said, “corruption would be eradicated from this country if our youth learned to say no to corruption, did not compromise with it and remained prepared to make sacrifices for getting rid of it.”

On the occasion of the concert, messages were sent in by the Chairperson of Transparency International (TI) Dr. Huguette
Report

Labelle, convener of the CCC Chittagong City Begum Mustari Shafi, wife of Bir Sreshtha Matiur Rahman Mili Rahman. These were shown to the audience through projections. Eminent citizens, vocal against corruption, including Mahfuz Anam, Dilara Zaman, Rokeya Kabir, Dr. Sonia Nishat Amin, Shirin Akhtar and Khushi Kabir addressed to the audience during the concert. The private TV channel Bangla Vision directly telecast the concert live from 5 in the afternoon to 6.30 in the evening. Besides, people all over the world enjoyed the concert through a web-link.

Today is an encouraging day. Enormous youth have come together for creating a corruption free Bangladesh as well as corruption free world. We have seen and you are witnessed that people who live in the wake of power are marginalized in society. Gender discrimination in the society increases corruption. People are deprived of education, employment and basic rights of life due to corruption which typically affects the women. The days of corruption and its expansion that is created by mail dominated society has come to an end. It is the high time to eradicate it.

Dr. Huguette Labelle, Chairperson, TI

The slogan, “Stand up - for Women’s Rights” uttered by TIB is a most appropriate and timely slogan. I wish success of the anti-corruption concert organized by TIB on the occasion of International Women’s Day. By combining this slogan with the anti-corruption movement, we have to carry forward the movement and reach the cherished goal of establishing equal rights for women in all spheres.

Begum Mustari Shafi, Convener, CCC Chittagong City

Expressions of Solidarity with the Concert

The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Daily Samakal, Weekly 2000, BDNews24.Com, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, Bangladesh Television, Channel-i, Bangla Vision, Radio Today, Radio Foorti, Radio Amar, Anirban Dotcombd, Amader Gaan, Bangladesh Info dot com and Metronet were the media partners of this concert organized by ACC and TIB. The Asiatic MCL, SAS, Cool Exposure and IFA were the event partners. Besides, the Gulshan Youth Club, Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and National Sports Council extended all-out cooperation for holding the event.

This is the month of achieving our independence. I would like to make a special call to the youth who have assembled with anti-corruption spirit on the occasion of International Women’s Day to become vocal for trial of the war criminals alongside raising the slogan ‘Wake up people, resist corruption’. We have failed to give peace to the souls of martyred freedom fighters despite the passage of 36 years after independence. This is the right time for taking this initiative. We shall continue to encourage and inspire the youths to do things which we ourselves could not do.

Mili Rahman, Wife of Bir Sreshtha Matiur Rahman
Above 30 thousand youth took an anti-corruption oath at the concert organised on 8 March on the occasion of International Women’s Day. The youth can play an important role in establishing women’s rights and curbing corruption committed against women. TIB organised the anti-corruption concert with this objective in mind. The youth have to be reached in conformity with their preferences. They would then accept it as their own. This initiative was taken with this belief. The youth were inspired by the spirit of upholding women’s rights and curbing corruption through this concert. They could realize that the women were lagging behind because of corruption. They were being deprived of their fundamental human rights. Just as it was impossible to establish women’s rights without combating corruption effectively, similarly women’s empowerment was a precondition for success in curbing corruption. It was not possible to achieve one without the other.

Today’s youth would go on to become responsible citizens of tomorrow. They therefore will have to know about corruption and remain respectful about human rights, democracy and good governance. In today’s society, women account for half of our total population. They can be groomed as human resource. For this, awareness and goodwill of all citizens in society are required. These messages could be conveyed to the youth through this concert.

Not only the youth, even elderly veterans participated in this concert. Alongside artists, people belonging to various classes and professions including educationists, writers, journalists, actors, development and human rights workers as well as women leaders expressed solidarity with this movement by stepping on to the stage. They spoke about establishing women’s rights and curbing corruption, which provided guidance to the youth.

Brief Quotes

Among the mediums being used in the campaign we are waging against corruption, concert is a major one. I believe this medium is quite effective; it is liked by many, especially the youth. We want to say through this concert – won’t indulge in corruption, won’t accept corruption, won’t tolerate corruption.

Lt. General (Retd.) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Chairman, Anti-Corruption Commission

If an egalitarian society is to be built, then one of the steps will have to be a corruption-free homeland. The youth should remember that they have a responsibility towards society for the benefits they are getting. This responsibility is to combat corruption wherever it takes place. Those who have come here are fortunate. We will be successful if those who could not come here are inspired and become involved in the anti-corruption movement.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, Chairman, TIB Trustee Board

Stand up - for Women’s Rights – I think this is the right time for waking up the youth. When everybody talks about women’s rights on a particular day, then even the illiterate women become conscious about their destiny and inner strength.

Dilara Zaman, Teacher and Actress

Today, all have become fully absorbed with this programme (concert). This programme should take place everyday. I want to see women just as I see them on the women’s day today or in an even more beautiful shape.

Fahmida Nabi, Vocal Artist
The members of TIB have expressed their pledge to effectively combat corruption from their respective positions. This resolve was stated at the Annual Meeting of Members 2007-08 held at the LGED Building of Agargaon on 29 March. Expressing their collective determination, the members said, “We hate corruption from the core of our hearts. We shall strive to resist corruption effectively from our respective positions by refraining from corrupt practices in our personal lives. We shall try to work together in all possible areas through various initiatives and efforts to gear up the social movement against corruption with the goal of putting a stop to corruption, which has spread in various spheres of society and state”.

Presided over by TIB member and former Ambassador Wali-ur-Rahman, the members welcomed the ongoing anti-corruption drive, separation of the judiciary from the executive, making the Anti-Corruption Commission effective and various legal and reform initiatives taken by the present caretaker government in different fields including the Election Commission and the Public Service Commission. The members urged all concerned including the government, political leaders and the civil society to take initiatives for adopting permanent and effective measures to check corruption. They opined that the coming parliamentary election was very important for building a well-governed and democratic Bangladesh through uprooting corruption from the country. They expressed optimism that there would be transition towards a democratic path in the country by organizing a free, neutral, participatory and corruption-free election. They called upon the government and the Election Commission to take initiatives to hold the election within the stipulated time in accordance with the roadmap.

Attended by around fifty members, members of the TIB Trustee Board Syeda Ruhi Ghuznavi, Advocate Tawfique Nawaz and M Hafizuddin Khan were also present. The meeting started with the address of welcome delivered by TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. Advocacy Officer Shamim Iftekhar presented a brief introduction on TI and TIB as well as achievements and potentials of the Making Waves project. A threadbare and open discussion took place on the future work-strategy including action-plan for the Making Waves project-2. The members put forward their views and advice quite spontaneously. In the concluding session, TIB member Abdullah Rakeeb recited a self-composed poem and the YES Group of CCC Gazipur presented song and drama. The Annual Meeting of members was concluded with a raffle draw participated by TIB members.

**Anti-Corruption Campaign in International Children’s Film Festival**

The 1st International Children’s Film Festival was held in Dhaka from 28 January to 3 February under the aegis of Bangladesh Children’s Film Society. TIB played a supportive role in the venture. It was inaugurated by Professor Anisuzzaman. Those who spoke in the opening ceremony included the Adviser for the Ministries of Primary and Mass Education and Culture Rasheda K. Chowdhury, artist Mustafa Monwar and educationist Dr. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal. TIB made arrangements for an anti-corruption campaign on the main premises of the festival. This included a display of anti-corruption advertisements and cartoons, distribution of stickers and greeting cards and collection of anti-corruption opinions.

TIB published special greeting cards on the occasion of the festival and held an exhibition with cartoons drawn from the 2007 anti-corruption cartoon competition. TIB Chairman Professor Muzaffer Ahmad and Trustee Board members Advocate Sultana Kamal and Prof. Abdullah Abu Sayeed attended an open question-answer session with over one hundred children invited from all over the country. The festival venues were all agog with the presence of the general public, the children and their guardians. Alongside watching films, the audience enjoyed looking at anti-corruption TVC/Public service announcement and cartoons of TIB. They also expressed their solidarity with TIB’s anti-corruption movement by writing comments in the opinion book.

Participants in the Annual Meeting of Members 2007-08

People visit TIB’s stall
An anti-corruption gathering and rally was organized in Satkhira on 22 March with the resolve to build a mass upsurge against all categories of corrupt elements and uprooting them from society. While inaugurating the gathering and rally, the ACC Chairman Lt. General (Retd.) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury said, “Our stand against corruption today is crystal-clear. People of all ages including males-females, students, service-holders and workers will have to be involved in this song of victory. Wherever you get the opportunity, please speak out for at least one minute against corruption and the corrupt”. Around 25 thousand people from at least 120 organizations and institutions including journalists, teachers, students, lawyers, owners-workers, businessmen, physicians, BNCC, rover scouts, girl-guides, development activists, human rights workers, NGO activists, literary and cultural activists participated in this rally organised by CCC-Satkhira in collaboration with ACC and the preparatory committee for the anti-corruption citizens’ gathering. Later, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman and the Vice-President of District Anti-Corruption Committee Dr. Motiur Rahman addressed the District Anti-Corruption Citizens’ Assembly held at Shaheed Abdur Razzaque Park. It was presided over by the convenor of the preparatory committee and CCC Convener Advocate Tapan Kumar Chakraborty.
Dual administration exists in land management of the country. Although six ministries and divisions are relevant, it is the Land and Law Ministries who are involved most. From the central to the field level, lack of coordination, indiscipline, stagnation and lack of transparency prevail in the country's land management sector because of lack of skilled manpower, improper coordination, and inappropirate working placements.

At a recently held workshop, the speakers have called for placing land-related activities of the Law Ministry under the Ministry of Land. At the workshop on 'Problems of good governance in land management and ways of overcoming', the speakers identified these problems and made some recommendations. The workshop was held at Andandabhaban Auditorium of Natore Rajbari on 24 March. Organised by CCC Natore, it was chaired by CCC member Professor Md. Jalal Uddin. TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman moderated it.

This workshop was organised to determine objectives for the advocacy programme of the Land Alliance. TIB staff M M Morshed presented an analytical report on land management in Bangladesh at the workshop. The report identified a number of problems related to land. These included: dual administration, weak land administration, top-down planning, insufficient information, lack of technological advancement, land-based power structure, dishonesty in sale and purchase of land, government bureaucracy, delay in processing of cases, corruption in land survey, discrimination in distribution of khas land, discriminatory inheritance law, etc. It was further stated in the report that total land in Bangladesh was 3,66,81,970 acres. Most of these are in private possession. Total number of plots are 150 million. Although land-people ratio was low in the country, land administration was quite bloated.

Citing various research works, the report said, 40 percent of corruption taking place at local level was related to land administration. This figure has been derived from direct transactions. If indirect expenses are also added (e.g. transport cost to land office, reduction of income due to additional trouble, etc.), then the volume of corruption would be higher.

The Land Alliance comprises of organizations which is working in the field of land rights, i.e. D.Net, Samata, Nijera Kori, ALRD and TIB. Those who were present as discussants in the workshop included Executive Director of D.Net Ananya Raihan, Executive Director of ALRD Shamsul Huda, Deputy Director of Samata Mainul Haque, Central Instructor of Nijera Kori Hasina Aktar, Deputy Commissioner of Natore SM Ehsan Kabir, Additional Deputy Commissioner (revenue) Md. Abdus Salam, Assistant Commissioner (land) Md. Enamul Haque and Md. Mehedi-ul-Shahid. Some victims of harassment who had gone to the land office for receiving services, members of the landless association and local NGO representatives were also present.

In the workshop, ALRD Executive Director Shamsul Huda said that there was no practical application of the laws and policies that we have in the country. Before initiating legal reforms, existing good policies should be applied first. It is not possible to frame new laws or undertake legal reforms without an effective parliament. Despite being harmful and discriminatory for the masses, the vested property law was still in vogue.

The Executive Director of D.Net Dr. Ananya Raihan said, "We are trying to take information technology up to the grassroots level. We seek to ensure right to information and its availability". The Deputy Commissioner of Natore said that there was need for proper coordination between the Land and Law Ministries for removing complexities in land management. Deputy Director of Samata Mainul Haque said that the presented paper had properly depicted prevailing mismanagement in the land sector. There was need for a new law after repealing the 'Shikast-Payast' law.

This new law should be such that the landless got 'Payasti' lands. Hasina Aktar of Nijera Kori said, that land-related cases accounted for a lion's share of the cases lying with the lower judiciary. Nobody would be able to work properly if there was insufficient financial allocation for the land offices. However complex the task of land management if the government and the people work in unison, then it
would be possible to resolve these complex issues. After sharing of experiences by the victims and open discussion, the participants at the workshop were divided into five groups. They prepared papers on four issues, viz. reform of land administration, land distribution system, legal reforms, and right to land and information; they later made group presentations. After this episode, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said in his concluding speech, “We have seen that corruption exists in the land sector. Women, indigenous population and the minorities are suffering from multifarious problems apart from land. These problems can be solved if we all work together”.

The recommendations made at the workshop included: the policy-farmers, administrators, development agencies and general people should all work together in a concerted manner; one-stop service should be introduced in land offices; e-governance should be expanded so that people can easily get necessary information; publicity of land related information should be geared up; necessary initiatives should be taken for establishing the rights of women, minorities and indigenous communities over land; an effective land policy should be formulated at the national level.

This year, TIB staff paid their respect by placing floral wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar while observing the Martyrs’ Day and International Mother Language Day on 21st February. A rally was organised prior to that. The rally started from in front of Eden Girls’ College and culminated at Shaheed Minar after travelling through the Dhaka University campus.
National Women Development Policy: A Brief overview

Many positive steps have been taken all over the world keeping in mind the slogan ‘Let human rights be the basis for women empowerment’. Bangladesh has been no exception. The formulation of the document ‘National Women Development Policy’ by the government is one such notable step. In the backdrop of a long movement waged by the conscious women of Bangladesh, the ‘National Women Development Policy’ was officially declared for the first time in Bangladesh on 8 March 1997 with the objectives of establishing equality of men and women at all levels of national life, ensuring security for women and their political, social, administrative and economic empowerment. A policy implementation strategy was also devised. But some changes were brought to the policy in 2004 during the tenure of the four party alliance government. As a result, provisions for equal partnership of women through participation in various spheres of national life were expunged. In the face of sustained demands by the conscious women of Bangladesh, the present caretaker government declared a new National Women’s Development Policy on 8 March 2008.

With the goal of empowering women, the 1997 women’s development policy contained provisions for full and equal opportunities for women with regard to rights of inheritance, property and land alongside other important matters. It called for framing of laws for realizing these objectives. But in the policy of 2004, the words ‘equal opportunity’, ‘inheritance’, ‘property’ and ‘right over land’ were omitted. In the 2008 policy, although the theme of equal opportunity for women was reinstated, the words ‘full opportunity’, ‘inheritance’ and ‘right over land’ have remained expunged.

The power of an individual in society depends on his economic status. Ownership or right over land is a key indicator of that. If various laws related to inheritance are reviewed, it is seen in all instances that the females have lesser scope for owning property. As a consequence, the son of a family gets more importance than the daughter because of his status as the main inheritor. The son, therefore, becomes the propagator of family power.

Article 42(1) of Bangladesh Constitution says, “Subject to any restrictions imposed by law, every citizen shall have the right to acquire, hold, transfer or otherwise dispose of property”. But generally, the inheritance laws in vogue in the country are discriminatory against women and are hindrances to their right over land. A frictionless and violence-free social structure cannot be established if the laws of the state are discriminatory.

In a male-dominated society, the head of the family is usually a man – father, father-in-law, husband, brother or son. Consequently, he is the decision-maker of the family. As the prevailing laws do not recognise the full and equal right and control of women over land, they usually lack the right in matters of changes in land ownership or any land related decision. Consequently, the males have a monopoly of power in the family. All social and state opportunities also remain at their disposal. Because of this control of the economic structure by men, the progress of women remains very limited and controlled.

After the recent declaration of National Women Development Policy, a certain quarter started a movement demanding scrapping of all sections and sub-sections related to equal rights for women. It is true that Islam allows women to inherit half of what men get, but is there any provision which says that more cannot be given if the need arises or when such demands are made? The laws, rules and regulations of the state are framed on the basis of the needs of all classes of people. It is universally applicable and can be changed for the welfare of all if the circumstances, time or place demand. Article 28(2) of Bangladesh Constitution says: “Women shall have equal rights in all spheres of the State and public life”. Article 29(1) says: “There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic”. References to equal rights for women which have been made in the 1997 and 2008 women development policies are reflections of the Constitution. The confusions which are being spread by a section of the religious leaders centring on the ‘National Women Development Policy’ in fact challenge our Constitution. Equality of rights for women is a pre-condition for realizing human rights on a global scale. The main issue of the movement appears to be hindering it from happening at any cost.

A female spends her life as a member of the repressed and backward segment of the population because of her position beyond the sphere of power created by a male-dominated society. As they are powerless, they unjustly become victims of tortures and repressions meted out by the powerful ones. Another name for this phenomenon is corruption. It razes down all efforts for national development. The vile attempt to cancel equal rights for women has added a new dimension to this issue. But the conscious citizens of this country would never accept this immoral behaviour. The day is not far away when we shall emerge victorious in our struggle to establish the rights of all human beings, including women, by keeping faith in the principle ‘The Truth of Humans is above everything else’.

Lovely Yeasmin Jeba, Senior Gender Officer, TIB
Noiticeb. The Invincible youth shall surely resist corruption'. Notable programmes of the YES members in CCC areas during the period January-March 2008 are narrated below.

Regional YES Convention in Satkhira
The Khulna divisional regional convention of YES groups took place at Mozaffar Garden of Satkhira on 18 January. Held under the aegis of Satkhira YES group, the convention was inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner Kefayet Ullah. TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman was present as the chief guest. Chaired by the convener of

Successful Initiative of Gazipur YES Group
The YES members of Gazipur came to know that Taka 100 was being collected from each student as a precondition for distribution of books at number 28 Deshipara Primary School under Gazipur Sadar Thana. This was a violation of government rules and the money so collected had totalled Taka 27,600. The YES members went on an inspection of the school on 5 January. They found the allegation to be true after talking with the students and guardians there. Later, when they spoke to the Headmaster on the matter, he also conceded that the allegation was true. He informed that this decision to take money for distribution of books was taken at a meeting of the managing committee held on 1 January.

When the YES members proved to the school authority that this extraction of money was unethical, the Headmaster sat with the managing committee at an emergency meeting. They decided to withdraw the decision of collecting Taka 100 per student. The chairman of the managing committee expressed his regret for the earlier decision and pledged not to take any money in future by violating government rules. This decision was welcomed by all guardians. They thanked the YES members for their cooperation.

Positive Changes in Sunamganj Sadar Hospital
Because of the indifference of Sunamganj Sadar Hospital authority and irregularities committed by on-duty doctors, patients coming to the hospital are routinely deprived of due services. Absence of doctors, non-supply of essential medicines to patients, lack of cleanliness, low-quality food, extraction of excess fees for services, and consultation by patients at private chambers of doctors was a regular feature. In this backdrop, the YES group of Sunamganj took up an initiative. As a result of their programmes like regular view-exchange with the hospital authority, setting up of counselling and complaint box at the hospital premises, and placement of advice and information desk each month at the hospital, the hospital authority became interested to improve service quality and check irregularities and corruption with the help of CCC and YES group. At one stage, necessary steps were taken for ensuring timely attendance of doctors, setting up of information board on available services, hanging of Fees List for medicines and services at different spots of the hospital and solving problems based on complaints made by the patients. The scenario in the hospital has now improved due to the initiatives taken by the YES members for raising the quality of services at Sunamganj Sadar Hospital.

Biography-writing Competition in Faridpur
The CCC Faridpur organised a biography-writing competition on valiant freedom fighters with the goal of highlighting to the present generation the memories, feelings and events of brave freedom fighters who had participated in the great liberation war of Bangladesh and to spread the spirit of liberation war among children. Students of class six to ten from various schools went to the residences of the brave freedom fighters of Faridpur and took their interviews in the guise of young journalists. The essay writing competition of these interviewers took place at the CCC office on 26 March. Sixteen students from different schools of Faridpur took part in this competition. They composed the eventful tales of 16 brave freedom fighters. The parents and siblings of the contestants were present on the day of the competition. Held under the leadership of the CCC convener, CCC and YES group members were present on the occasion.

Inauguration of Chapai Nawabganj Library
A library was set up through the initiative of YES group of CCC Chapai Nawabganj on 2 February with the goal of expediting the anti-corruption movement. The library was inaugurated by Ziaul Haque – a book lover well-known as a selfless person. He welcomed this initiative by the YES members. The CCC members present at the opening ceremony called upon the YES members to sharpen themselves through study instead of confining them to mere setting up of a library. The YES members expressed their firm determination on the matter. It may be mentioned that this library has been established by collecting over one hundred books from families related to CCC members.

Anti-Corruption Cycle Rally in few CCCs
An anti-corruption cycle rally was organised under the aegis of CCC Kushia on the occasion of Independence Day with the slogan ‘Corruption is a hindrance to realization of the dream of independence’. The CCC Kurigram organised a
colourful cycle rally, discussion meeting and anti-corruption oath-taking ceremony on the occasion of International Women’s Day on 8 March with the slogan ‘Stand up - for Women’s Rights’. The YES members of CCC Kishoreganj went round various roads of Boulii union by riding cycles from Kishoreganj town with a call to the youth for waking up in the spirit of liberation war. Sixty members of CCC Faridpur and YES group went round the town with an anti-corruption cycle rally on 30 January.

Painting and Handwriting Competition in Jamalpur
A painting and handwriting competition was held with the participation of 166 primary school students through the joint initiative of CCC Jamalpur and Sadar Upazila Education Office on the occasion of Martyrs Day and International Mother Language Day. The paintings and handwritings were exhibited after the competition. Over one thousand spectators belonging to various classes and professions including school teachers and guardians of the district were present at the exhibition.

Anti-Corruption Wall-painting and Concert in Chakaria
Slogans like ‘Wake up people, resist corruption’, ‘If you want country’s progress, then corruption has to be tackled’, etc. were painted on walls recently under the aegis of YES members and YES friends of Chakaria and Cox’s Bazar. These wall paintings were sketched by the YES members at important places adjacent to Upazila Councils and also on the walls of Cox’s Bazar Stadium by the Cox’s Bazar YES Friends Group. This anti-corruption urgings by the youth also motivated the tourists.

An anti-corruption concert was organised by the CCC Chakaria with participation of the YES group members on the occasion of International Women’s Day on 8 March. The spectators who attended the programme made pledges to combat child-marriage, dowry, drugs and women’s repression.

Four Youth Walk Hundred Miles in Mymensingh
Four Rover Scouts of Mymensingh Anandamohan College walked hundred miles between 27 March morning and 31 March afternoon with the objective of generating mass awareness in favour of building a corruption-free Bangladesh. One of the participants was a member of the Mymensingh YES group. During their journey, the youth returned to Mymensingh after travelling through Haluaghat, Nalitabari, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Nandina and Muktagacha. The youth distributed anti-corruption stickers, leaflets and posters during their journey and carried festoons containing demands for a corruption-free Bangladesh.

Distribution of Pure Drinking Water in Pirojpur
The YES group of CCC Pirojpur set up the Satellite Al Desk at Pirojpur Sadar Hospital on 24 March. The programme included assisting the hospital authority as well as patients by providing the patients with healthcare information. The YES group members distributed one bottle of pure drinking water per bed to the general patients free of charge. The Residential Medical Officer of Pirojpur Sadar Hospital expressed satisfaction with the programme and called for running the AI-Desk on a regular basis.

Poetry Recitation Competition in Bagerhat
The YES group of CCC Bagerhat organised a poetry recitation competition with the theme ‘The invincible youth shall surely resist corruption’, ‘wake up youth, resist corruption’. Over one hundred contestants from eight schools participated in it. The YES members divided the participants into different groups before selecting them for the finals. One teacher was nominated from each of the concerned schools for acting as judge in the selection stage. Those who were selected for the finals were given orientation on the subject of pronunciation. The final round of the anticorruption poetry competition was held on 4 February. Later, the prize-giving ceremony took place with spontaneous participation of the CCC members and the YES group.

Human Chain for Citizens’ Rights in Sreemangal
An one-hour long human chain was formed at the Choumohana of Sreemangal town on 16 March through the initiative of CCC Sreemangal. It called for a stop to the use of illegal hydraulic horns causing sound pollution, random parking of vehicles, smoking while inside motor vehicles and urged all to obey traffic rules. People belonging to various professions including BNCC, Girl Guides, students of various schools and colleges, YES group of the CCC, YES Friends group, CCC members, journalists, teachers, common people, activists of various socio-cultural organizations and development activists participated in it. A memorandum was submitted to the authorities on behalf of CCC Sreemangal on conclusion of the event. Besides, the YES group organised an anti-corruption cycle rally with the slogan ‘Wake up people, resist corruption’ for generating awareness and spreading an anti-corruption spirit. After going round Sreemangal town, this 27 kilometre long rally culminated at the CCC office.

Human Chain in Sreemangal
Reception to Freedom Fighters in Khulna
In his address as the chairperson of the programme organised by CCC Khulna on the occasion of Independence Day on 26 March, CCC member and valiant freedom fighter Shaikh Abdul Quayum said that it was possible to implement the spirit of independence war through trial of the war criminals. The programme included reception to freedom fighters, quiz competition, cultural programme and prize giving ceremony. The programme was opened with the playing of national anthem. YES members of CCC Khulna Marifun Nagma Sraboni, Arpita Kundu and SMG Newaz greeted the three brave freedom fighters with floral wreaths. The address of welcome was delivered by the CCC member Professor Muhammad Zafar Imam. Brief life-sketches of the freedom fighters were read out by the CCC member Syed Monwar Ali. The freedom fighters who were accorded reception were Md. Abdus Sattar Sikdar, Tapan Kumar Biswas and TM Nizamul Haque. They reminisced about the war days. After the reception, a quiz competition on the liberation war was held. It was participated by secondary level school students.

Regional CCC and YES Convention Held in Rajshahi
A demand was made for trying the war criminals of the liberation war during the CCC and YES Convention of Rajshahi region which took place on 19 January in Rajshahi city. Besides, a pledge was made in the convention declaration to build a country free from corruption and communalism by becoming imbued with patriotism and liberal values. Over two hundred CCC and YES members present at the convention extended their support to the declaration.

Held at the Uttara Community Centre under the aegis of CCC Rajshahi City, YES and CCC members from Chapai Nawabganj, Natore, Rajshahi City and Kushtia were present. It was inaugurated by eminent litterateur Hasan Azizul Huq and chaired by the CCC Rajshahi City convener Advocate Ghulam Arief Tipoo. A resolution of condoling for the death of Justice KM Sobhan, drama personality Dr. Salim Al-Din, language movement veteran and poet Mahbubul Alam, member of CCC Kurigram Shamsun Nahar Chowdhury, MA Razzak of Kushtia, Shormin Kader of Comilla and people’s theatre activist of CCC Pirojpur Kabir Khan Nanna was adopted at the convention. A One-minute silence was observed for paying respect to the martyrs of the liberation war and various democratic struggles. In the second session, presentations were made on the achievements and future plans of CCWs. The CCC Convener Advocate Abu Md. Saiful Islam Reza and YES member Md. Kharirul Islam Babu spoke on behalf of CCC Chapai Nawabganj. Joint Convener Advocate Amzad Hossain and YES member Soniya Akter made presentations on behalf of CCC Natore. Convener Professor Sudin Kumar Lahiri and YES members Sonia Sultana Mosumi and Ismet Zarin Bintey Nizam spoke on behalf of CCC Kushtia. And CCC member Dr. Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan Sajal and YES member Md. Hozzatul Islam Shohag made presentations on behalf of CCC Rajshahi City. In the open discussion session, TIB Executive Director gave replies to various queries. The convention declaration was presented by the Rajshahi CCC member Akbarul Hasan Milat. In the third session of the regional convention held with the slogan ‘Wake up people, resist corruption’, the people’s theatres produced by the YES Groups of Chapai Nawabganj, Natore, Kushtia and Rajshahi City were staged respectively.

Seminar on Gender in Patiya
Former Adviser to the caretaker government and member of the TIB Trustee Board Advocate Sultana Kamal has said – it was not true that males were committing corruption to cater to the demands of females, or corruption is resorted to by men at the behest of women. In a male-dominated social system, women have to discharge most of the familial responsibilities. Most of the household chores including feeding children or taking care of sick offspring were done by females. Work-load of women would have diminished a lot if men had discharged their duties properly. Even then, women were being linked to corruption today. She said this as chief guest at a seminar on ‘Role of Women in Curbing Corruption’ held on 18 January under the aegis of CCC Patiya at the upazila auditorium. Chaired by the CCC member Kabi S.M. Noor-ul-Alam, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Patiya Md. Shahidul Alam and women’s leader Jesmin Sultana Paru were special guests. The keynote paper at the seminar was presented by Assistant Professor ABM Abu Noman of the Law faculty of Chittagong University. The CCC Convener Avijit Barua Manu delivered the address of welcome. Besides, those who took part in the open discussion included Comrade SM Yusuf, leader of teachers’ association Shyamol Dey, Engineer Ashutosh Barua, UP member Protima Debi, teacher Azhar Uddin and College student Paheli Dey.
Information Board on Services in Jessore

The members of the Fatehpur Union Council sat with the local people at a gathering organised by the Council with assistance from CCC Jessore on 6 February. The chairman and members of the Union Council replied to various queries made by the citizens at the gathering. It was chaired by the acting chairman of Fatehpur Union Md. Mafizul Islam. The key speaker at the Face the Public program was the CCC Convener Dr. Mustafijur Rahman. CCC member Advocate Syeda Masuma Begum read out the list of functions carried out by the Union Council and the fees it charged for various services. Eminent personalities of the Union presented their views on the occasion. The YES members of CCC Jessore set up an Advice and Information Desk at the meeting. After the meeting, a people’s theatre titled ‘Parinam’ (Consequence) was staged there by the People’s Theatre Group. The YES members distributed 300 fact-sheets and 100 health-related information-sheets among the audience. A complain box and an information board on various services rendered by the Union Council were set up on behalf of CCC Jessore at the Union Council Office. The complain box was inaugurated by the acting chairmain Md. Mafizul Islam.

Positive Changes at Ibrahimpur Government Primary School of Sunamganj

Infrastructural problems, mismanagement and various limitations have been bedevilling Ibrahimpur Government Primary School for long. Just as one electricity pole was creating hindrance to construction of the new school building, similarly late attendance by teachers, lack of initiatives by the school managing committee and absence of awareness among guardians on sending their offspring to school on time were lowering the quality of education at this school. Open toilets in adjacent residential houses was spoiling the surrounding environment; similarly, there was no arrangement for water supply. A disinterested school authority, obstinate attitude of the electricity office, indifference of the contractor and lethargy of the guardians were piling up problems for this school. In this backdrop, initiatives by CCC Sunamganj have resulted in some successes for the school. The initiatives included motivating the electricity authority to remove the pole, encouraging the contractor and the LGED authority to start construction of the building quickly, highlighting to the Union Council the need for building a guard-wall for the school under the LGSP project, arranging the mothers’ gathering jointly with the school authority and guardians, and ensuring timely attendance by teachers and students after exchanging views with the school managing committee.

As a result, the rural electrification authority removed the electric pole and construction of the building has started with the cooperation of LGED authority. Construction of a guardwall for protection of environment has started with assistance from the Union Council. Installation of a tube-well for water supply would start very soon. Just as timely attendance by teachers has increased, similarly regular attendance by children is also being ensured due to enhanced awareness of guardians. The number of school-going students has increased on the one hand and on the other hand drop-out rate has declined. This has also contributed to better results. The expectations of the local people centring on the school have risen. Overall, there are clear signs of positive changes at Ibrahimpur Government Primary School.

Distribution of Educational Equipment at Bagerhat

All parents dream of their children realizing their dreams one day and bringing smiles to their faces after getting better education. But despite all good intentions, things become a nightmare for many due to financial insolvency. Sensing this dissatisfaction, the CCC Bagerhat distributed educational equipments among the distressed but meritorious students on 2 February with assistance received from the CCCs of Chapai Nawabganj, Muktagachha, Sreemangal, Jhenidah and Lalmonirhat as well as TIB. Many individuals and organizations are working for spreading the light of education among poor and distressed children. The educational equipments were distributed among the top three students of classes one to five in four such schools. One bag, three writing books, one pencil, one sharpener and one eraser per head were distributed among each of the 60 students by the CCC Bagerhat. In addition, books were distributed free of cost among 15 distressed students of various classes. The distribution of educational items was supervised by the
CCC member and convener of YES group Md. Jakir Hossain. The educational equipments were handed over to students by teacher Farida Khanam of Shuvechhha Childrens’ (regd.) Primary School, teacher Munni Akhtar of Majhidanga BRAC School, teacher Md. Ruhul Amin of Majeda Begum Dushtha Shishu Niketan and teacher Shahanara Begum of Dr. Mozammel Hossain Pouraghat Primary School.

Watch Group Formed in Kurigram

A school watch group was constituted at Khalilganj Government Primary School on 29 March under the aegis of CCC Kurigram. It was formed mainly to extend cooperation to the school managing committee and also observe performance of this committee. The members of the Watch Group would subsequently be considered for inclusion in the next school managing committee. Eminent persons of the locality and members of the school managing committee as well as the CCC were present at the meeting on formation of this committee. Looking at this new development in a positive light, chairman of the school managing committee Alhaj Saber Hossain said that this would help gear up the activities of his committee. The members of the school managing committee and the newly constituted school watch group agreed to take initiative for providing school dresses to those students who lack financial capacity. They were also in agreement on holding of an annual sports competition with the participation of eminent individuals of the locality. On behalf of the CCC, its Convener A. T. M. Enamul Haque Chowdhury, convener of the sub-committee on education Md. Shahabuddin and member A. K. M. Samiul Haque Nantu were present in the meeting.

The Staff Convention 2007-08 of TIB was held in Cox’s Bazar from 24 to 28 February with the participation of all employees of TIB. The main objective of this convention was to evaluate successes and failures in the light of the actionplan for 2007; side by side, exchange of experience and opinion about strategic plan, budget, management and institutional development of next Project also took place. In his address of welcome on the opening day, TIB Executive Director described 2007 as a year of success for TIB. He mentioned about various successful programmes of the year such as widespread discussions regarding the nature of corruption, reforms of the Anti-Corruption Commission, incorporation of essays on corruption in the text-books of schools and colleges, reform and reconstitution of the Election Commission and the Public Service Commission, ratification of the UN Convention Against Corruption, reforms in the Passport Office and Chittagong Port Authority, etc. He extended his sincere felicitation to all TIB staffs for the joint anticorruption initiative called ‘Wake up people’ undertaken by TIB and ACC. The 5-day long convention was concluded with the staging of a cultural show, where TIB staffs and their family-members participated.
World Theatre Day was observed all over the world on 27 March. The International Theatre Institute declared 27 March as the World Theatre Day in 1961 and it was then observed for the first time in Vienna. The day has been observed in many countries of the world since 1962 and also in Bangladesh with much pomp since 1984. Once, theatre was considered as a medium of entertainment. That position is no longer valid. Now theatre is being used in various media in different ways. Dramas are being utilised for developmental and educational work. Above all, they are being applied for raising awareness and even for mental therapy. The CCCs are using theatres for making people conscious and vocal against corruption.

Presently, 34 people’s theatre groups are in operation at the CCC level with the support of TIB and supervision by respective CCCs. A people’s cultural group is also functional now. Besides, there is one Gambhira song and another Palagan team. From January to March 2008, the number of people’s theatre and cultural groups’ presentations in 35 CCC areas were 61.

A production-based people’s theatre workshop was held under the joint auspices of CCC Madhupur and TIB from 13 to 18 January at the BADC Training Institute. A total of 21 theatre workers participated in this workshop. Of them, 10 were female and 11 male. A technical show of the drama ‘Mayer Kanna’ (Cry of the Mother) was staged on the last day of the workshop at local Upazila Parishad auditorium.

A 3-day long motivational workshop was held from 17 to 19 March at Sylhet CCC premises. A new drama was produced and its technical show was staged on the last day of the workshop.

A 4-day long production-based cultural workshop of the People’s Cultural Group of CCC Sunamganj was held from 16 to 19 March. A total of 13 cultural activists including 5 females and 8 males took part in it. This is for the first time that a people’s cultural group and people’s culture workshop were organised by any of the 36 CCCs. A presentation has been sequenced with anti-corruption song and choreography, poem, a drama on the subject of healthcare and a song on communal harmony written by Shah Abdul Karim. The People’s Cultural Group presented a programme before the citizens of Sunamganj on the occasion of Independence Day on 26 March. It earned the praise of all. Besides, refresher workshops will be held next month at the CCCs of Lalmonirhat and Rangpur.
**TI Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres**

Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Guatemala have been formed Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALAC). ALACs promote the relationship between citizens’ demand for justice based on corruption cases, and the capacity of the system to address these cases. This methodology stimulates citizen empowerment through legal assistance and advice in presenting the complaints. Moreover, the information recorded from the complaints is used to plead the case of institutional and legal changes in order to reduce the risks of corruption and bring back public trust in the official institutions.

The TI national chapter in Guatemala, Acción Ciudadana, is the first national chapter in Latin America to open an ALAC. Besides Acción Ciudadana, other TILAC Chapters have also shown interest in the methodology, which was originally developed in the Eastern European region.

TI national contact in Ukraine, the “Anticorruption Committee”, received funding from Management System International to implement a ‘Legal Assistance to Citizens through Anticorruption Hotline’. The project provides legal advice to victims of corruption and a toll-free hotline through which citizens can seek advice in corruption related matters. A national public campaign to advertise the new service will start soon. In February, TI national chapter in formation in Kyrgyzstan opened its first ALAC in Bishkek.

Many countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and America i.e. Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Armenia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Mongolia, Turkey, Ukraine, Switzerland, Zambia, Kenya, Algeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Lebanon, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Palestine, Rwanda, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Uruguay, Fiji, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Sri Lanka as well the Al-Desk of TIB, are now being operating like ALAC. Though differences stand among the structure and name but the key objective of this sort of programme is to work for common people’s right to information.

**UN Corruption Conference held**

Transparency International (TI) and a broad civil society anti-corruption coalition have labelled as a major setback the failure of the international corruption conference on Bali to agree on how to independently assess country progress in implementing the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The conference was held in Bali from 28 January to 1 February.

Disagreement at the conference meant that concrete steps will only be decided at the next Conference on the Convention in late 2009, six years after the instrument was adopted. Civil society groups now fear a failure to build momentum and a downgrading of the Convention on political agendas. They characterised it as a disappointment for the billions of victims of corruption, who are meant to be represented by the national delegations at the UN conference.

During the conference, the proposals of negotiating blocks diverged widely on the form a country progress review programme should take, and in terms of the transparency of the process and the participation of civil society. After a week of tough negotiations, country delegates struggled through to the evening of the last day to arrive at consensus. Conflicting positions on the role of civil society kept delegates locked in discussions through to the very end. As the conference closed, the question remained unresolved.

Despite a week of negotiations, the outcome in Bali failed to meet the promise of the first conference in Jordan, which recognised a review mechanism as being of 'paramount importance' and the need as 'urgent'. It is therefore essential that there be an ongoing programme of engagement and planning by the UN and governments in the two years until the next conference, so that no further opportunity is missed.

The results fell far short of the progress civil society groups had hoped to see, but there were a few positive notes. A great deal of emphasis was rightly placed on the recovery of stolen assets, a key issue for many developing countries including Indonesia, Nigeria and Peru, which have been burdened by kleptocratic regimes.

Agreement to expand the country self-assessment programme and the pilot programme for country peer review, represented modest but constructive steps towards building a more robust review approach. The success of all aspects of the Convention depends on the strength of a monitoring programme.

Civil society pressed for greater protection of critical voices, pointing to the difficulties whistle-blowers, activists, trade unionists and investigative journalists encounter when speaking out against corruption. Many of the civil society representatives attending the event told of painful, personal encounters with harassment, intimidation and reprisals. Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, represented TIB at the conference.
Anti-Corruption Concert and Women’s Rights

Corruption is the main hindrance to establishment of women’s rights. The women are harmed most by corruption. The ACC and TIB organised an anti-corruption concert at Gulshan Youth Club on the International Women’s Day on 8 March with the goal of sensitising the youth about building resistance to corruption for ensuring women’s rights. Our only expectation would be generation of awareness among today’s youth about the rights of women through the anti-corruption concert. Many many thanks to TIB and ACC for such a beautiful programme.

Bushra, North Badda, Dhaka

Dialogue and Election

The nation stands at a crossroad today. All segments of the country’s population want a free and fair election within December. And through election, a government elected by the people would assume office. Dialogue is an important input for holding a free and fair election. But the dialogue has to be effective. Proper guidelines for running the country can be obtained through dialogue, so that the elected government can run the country properly. We dream of a country where there would be no irregularities and misdeeds, and at the same time rule of law would be established. Our expectation would be a fruitful dialogue through cooperation of the government and political parties.

Anan Kabir, Ramkrishna Mission Road, Lalmonirhat

TIB has recently published a research titled ‘Corruption in Public Universities’. Professor Dr. Muhammad Yeahia Akhtar of the Political Science Department of Chittagong University conducted this research on public universities under the fellowship programme of TIB. He later wrote this book. The book contains lot of information including widespread corruption and mismanagement at various levels of Dhaka and Chittagong University. Side by side with discussing the magnitude and dimension of corruption in various tiers of public University, the author has made a number of recommendations for their prevention. The book is available at AHD Publication House, 143, New Market, Dhaka - 1205.

Email: ahdphbd@gmail.com.

13th International Anti-Corruption Conference

Preparations for the 13th International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) are underway. The theme for this year’s conference is: “Global Transparency: Fighting corruption for a sustainable future,” with a focus on the role of transparency and accountability in human security, climate change, sustainable globalisation, natural resources exploitation and management. The Conference will be taking place in Athens, Greece from 30 October to 2 November ’08.