

YCW Group Melatur presented Memorandum

Thursday, 16 August 2007

Young Agricultural workers in Melatur achieve Rs. 5 increase in their daily wage!!

YCW Melatur presented Memorandum and had negotiation with landlords to increase the daily wage of agricultural workers.

Context of the action

Melatur is an agricultural area in Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, India. The lands are owned by the upper caste land lords. The dalits women (lower caste) work in the farms of these upper castes land lords. The dalits do not own any land. The women work as daily wage workers in these farms. The daily wage is Rs. 30 (Euro 0.54) per day per person. They work from 10 to 12 hours per day. However, they need at least Rs. 45 to spend for their daily food per person. Over and above they need to spend for other needs such as cloths, medicine, education of the children, and maintenance of the huts (homes they live in). Moreover, this is seasonal work and they could get maximum 6 months work per year. Other six months the men migrate to towns and cities to find jobs.

There is a Young Christian Workers (YCW) base group in Melatur with 12 members. They are young women from the age of 16 to 24. The base group members also are working in these farms under the landlords.

The concrete problem of workers YCW tried to solve through this action was low wage. The group wanted to increase the wage from Rs. 30 to Rs. 35. Why the group could not demand the wage increase to Rs. 45 was that in this area when workers demand for wage increase, the landlords raise the wage to Rs. 1 or 2. If they persist with the demand, then the landlords bring in workers from near by villages to work in the farms. This will result into loss of job for the workers in action. Therefore, even to demand to increase the wage to Rs. 5 more is a big challenge. However, the group thought it is an achievable demand.

Strategy evolved

The YCW base group members participated in the district level one day training session on Finance education. During this training, these members could discover that their income (wage) was not sufficient to meet their daily needs (food)

The YCW members went back into their group and discussed again about their salary. They came to the conclusion that they could not have good food if they have such a low salary. They also realised that it is their right to have just and decent wage. Therefore they decided to demand the landlords to increase the wage of all agricultural workers from Rs. 30 to Rs. 35.

The YCW members lobbied with the local people on the need of the wage increase and got the support of the people and all agricultural workers in their area.

Then YCW leaders with local leaders met with the landlords 2 times and presented the demand of increase in the wage and explained the need of it. After this negotiation the landlords did not agree to increase the wage.

Then all workers in this area went for a one day strike (refuse to work in the fields of the landlords). Then the landlords came down for another negotiation and finally agreed to increase the wage to Rs. 35 per day.

Result of the action

Result of the action was that wage was increased from Rs. 30 to Rs. 35. This is really a significant improvement in the working condition of the agricultural workers. The workers now feel confident to take up further actions. The leaders of YCW feel the importance of a movement and getting organised to achieve the demands. There is support for the activities of YCW from the people. 2 YCW leaders developed and improved their capacity in planning and lobbying